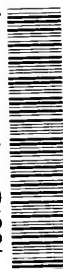


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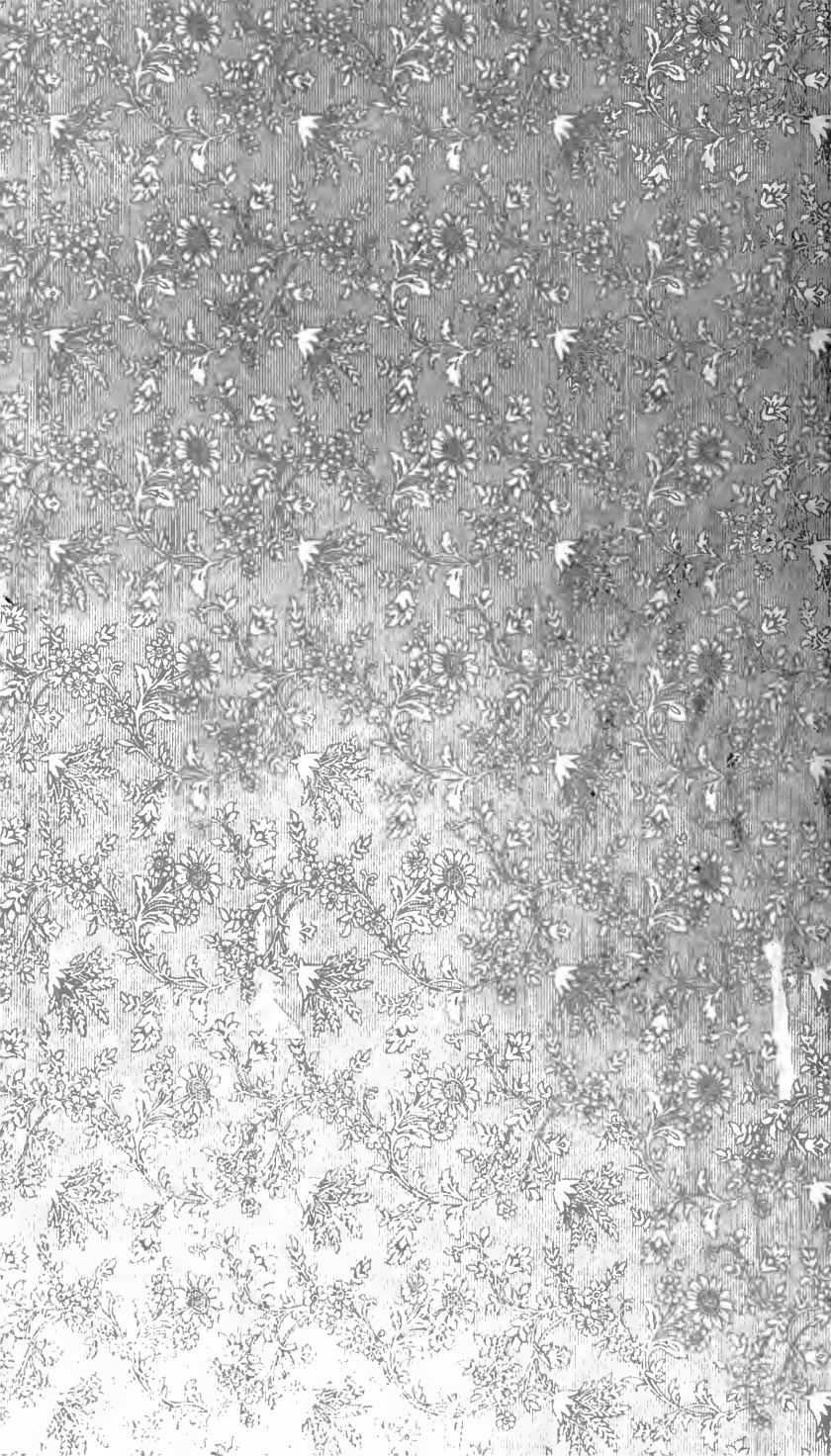
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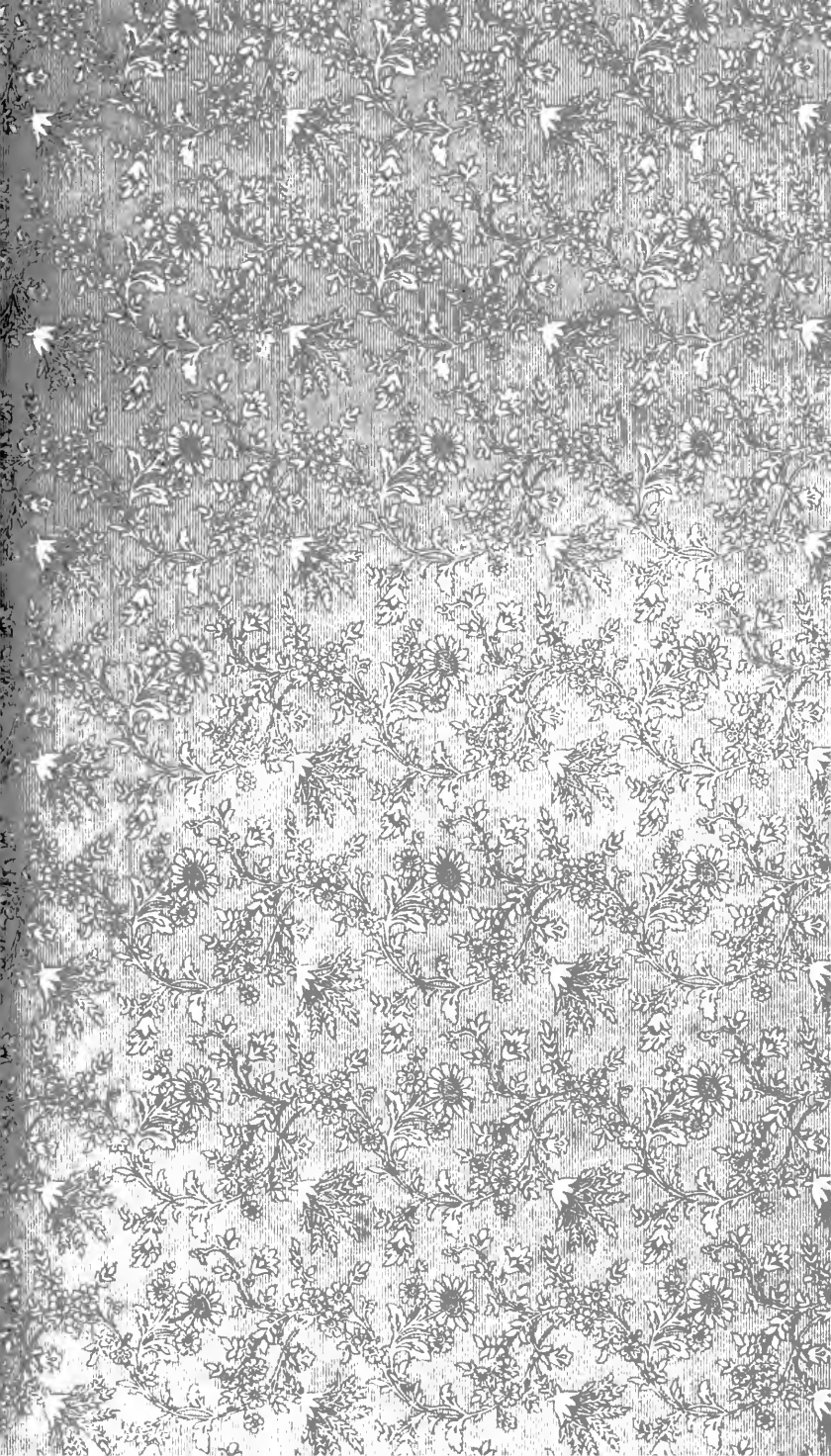


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*Young's History Edition*

THOMAS BECKET.







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**THOMAS BECKET.**

*A Drama.*

WILLIAMS BOOKS

3 3



## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

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HENRY II., King of England.

THOMAS BECKET, Chancellor of England, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury.

JOHN OF PAVIA, the Pope's Legate.

WILLIAM, the King's brother.

The EARL OF LEICESTER.

The EARL OF CORNWALL.

JOCELINE DE ARUNDEL.

The ARCHBISHOP OF YORK.

The BISHOP OF LONDON.

The BISHOP OF CHICHESTER.

The BISHOP OF WINCHESTER.

The BISHOP OF SALISBURY.

The ABBOT OF ST. ALBANS.

RICHARD DE LUCI, Grand Justiciary.

HUGH DE MORVILLE,	} Knights.
WILLIAM DE TRACY,	
REGINALD FITZURSE,	
RICHARD LE BRETON,	
RANULPH DE BROC,	

ROBERT DE BROC, brother to Ranulph.

HERBERT DE BOSHAM, Becket's Secretary.

FITZNIGEL, Becket's Steward.

GRIMM, a clerk of Cambridge.

PENDA, an English swineherd.

ROLAND, a Norman huntsman.

A Leech, an Officer, a Huntsman, a Herald.

Lords, Bishops, Soldiers, Huntsmen, Servants, Monks,  
Citizens, Priests, Clerks, Becket's dependents, &c.

MAUD, Empress of Germany, Mother of Henry II.

ELEANOR, Queen of England.

ROSAMOND CLIFFORD.

MATILDA, a mad woman.

Ladies, Nuns, Servants, Wives of Becket's dependents,  
&c.

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## ACT I.

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### SCENE I. (A.D. 1162)—*Courtyard of the Castle of Falaise.*

(Servants and soldiers moving across stage. Enter ROLAND leaning on a boar spear; he sits and cleans it, humming a song. Enter PENDA from Castle gate.)

---

PENDA. Give you good morrow, Roland !

ROLAND. Ha ! old Penda !

Good morrow may be, but this cursed to-day

Is slow as sleuth hound, lingering here and there.

PENDA. Yet, as a true hound, sure to find its end.

ROLAND. Hast seen the king ?

PENDA. Aye, some six hours ago.

ROLAND. Found he the quarry ?

PENDA. He and his following

Were in full cry.

ROLAND. And I am limping here

One foot before the other, as a wench

Chooses her way in wet.

PENDA. Is not thy hurt

Yet healed aright ?

ROLAND. Nay, or I were with them,

To hear the merry chorus of the hounds,

More musical than bells, to mark the deer

Flirt from the quaking fern the morning dew,

Or crash amid the branches, antlers back,

Head high, throat quivering, the hard hoof-stroke

Dinting the feathered moss—Oh curséd hurt,

That holds me laggard here !

PENDA.                      How came it, Roland ?

ROLAND. On Monday last, a mere chance-medley stroke,—  
A boar at bay—the hounds about his chaps  
As bees in swarming—foaming he, half rage,  
Half terror, pink eyes twinkling,—I, alone,  
With but a knife, a silly thing a knife,  
Must needs be at him. So he with a tush,  
Rare weapons tushes, struck me here between  
The knee and ankle, bore me bleeding down,  
A limping lout.

[illegible]

ROLAND.                      Nay! Nay! Two were as sad as I;  
But, as he laid himself to do my death,  
Flashed a broad spear above me, and he drew  
Backward a little, poised himself again,  
The red goutts dripping from his bristly hide,  
His foam blood-spotted; but the ruddy blade  
Pushed by a strong hand home bade him give space,  
And smote him yet again; so he bent low  
And stretched himself and shivered, and so died.

PENDA. And whose the hand ?

ROLAND. Whose but the chancellor's,  
Stout Thomas Becket's.

PENDA.                   He! The king's right hand.

ROLAND. The king's right hand had never struck so true ;  
Though he, God bless him, is a goodly man,  
Loving the hunt and hunters.

PENDA. Is't not strange  
My lord the chancellor should lead the chase,  
Being a churchman?

ROLAND.                        Only by the tonsure.

PENDA. Nay! For myself am come from Canterbury,  
Whereof my own liege master Theobald,  
Sometime archbishop, much esteeming him,  
Made him archdeacon.

ROLAND. Priest or not a priest,  
Deacon or chancellor, whate'er he be,  
There's many a yeoman pricker of the king,

Aye, many a huntsman, has not half his skill  
In honest woodcraft.

PENDA. He has English blood.

ROLAND. Nay! Norman as I live.

PENDA. Not so indeed!

Gilbert, his father, and the Atheling  
Edgar were of one race.

ROLAND. A very lie!

His forebears fought at Hastings.

PENDA. Standing there  
Around the Sussex dragon.

ROLAND. Peace, thou hound!

Shall I not know, whose grandsire gave his blood  
To crown Duke William?

PENDA. That and that for thy duke!  
Becket is English, save some Saracen blood  
Came of his mother.

ROLAND. Saracen, thou sayest?

A very honest woman, she, of Caen.

PENDA. Out, out upon thee! How thou liest now!  
'Tis common talk!

ROLAND. Too common to be true!

PENDA. An Emir's daughter!

ROLAND. That for thine Emir!

Clodpate Saxon!

PENDA. Niddering Norman!

ROLAND. Ha!

*(They are about to fight, when the servants separate them.)*

1ST SERVANT. Have ye a hundred hands, that so ye dare,  
Within the very compass of the court,  
Flash warring weapons? know ye not the law,—  
Whoe'er in enmity draws sword, lays spear,  
Bends bow, springs whittle, on his adversary,  
Forfeits his dexter hand! *(Horns heard.)*

Ho! there above!

Warders, your posts! Perchance it is the king!

*(Enter through the castle gate KING, DE LUCI, DE MORVILLE,  
lords and huntsmen.)*

## CHORUS OF HUNSMEN :

*Robin he lieth abed, abed,*

*Merrily sound the lusty horn !*

*A pot of good ale stands near by his head,*

*Merrily sound the lusty horn !*

*But Richard is up and away, away,*

*For a stag by his arrow must die to-day,*

*Merrily sound the lusty horn !*

*The horn ! The horn ! The lusty horn !*

*Merrily sound the lusty horn !*

*Robin is lanley and loose and long,*

*Merrily sound the lusty horn !*

*Richard is sturdy and stout and strong,*

*Merrily sound the lusty horn !*

*Say, pretty maiden, which will you wed,*

*Richard so nimble, or Robin abed ?*

*Merrily sound the lusty horn !*

*The horn ! The horn ! The lusty horn !*

*Merrily sound the lusty horn !*

KING. A very noble stag.

DE MORVILLE.

Indeed, my liege

A royal hart.

KING.

Had he brow, bay and tray ?

DE MORVILLE. Twelve times I'll swear, my lord;—a kingly

See with what ease he slipped us.

[beast !

KING.

Aye ! The deer

That tires old Bran and Battle there must needs

Fly on the wings o' the wind. It were but wise

To give him life that he may timely sire

Sons of his courage. Let him be declared

In town and village through the country round

As the king's hart proclaimed.

HERALD. Oyez ! oyez ! Forasmuch as it hath pleased our

lord the king to spare, for his high courage, a

royal hart of great size and swiftness, know all

men by these presents, that whosoever shall

hurt, maim, or kill the said hart, shall for the

same crime presently suffer death or blindness

by the loss of his eyes, as may be the king's pleasure. Oyez ! oyez ! oyez !

(Enter BECKET in armour, with a hawk on his wrist, with him RICHARD LE BRETON bound, soldiers and attendants.)

KING. Come to my arms,  
Thou king of hunters, prince of all good fellows !  
Nay ! never lout the knee ! Too glad the hour  
For idle courtesy that brings thee back.

BECKET. My lord !

KING. This very day we needed thee.  
Hast heard ? A royal hart ! And he hath 'scaped,  
Gone, by my soul ! Had'st only thou been there,  
Were no such bungling. What's thy sorcery,  
That at thy leading hounds have truer scent,  
Horses new wind, and spurs a sharper point ?  
'Tis pity that thou art my chancellor,  
Since heav'n hath granted thee such forest skill  
As made a ranger's fortune.

BECKET. Good my lord,  
I pray thee pardon me ; what skill I have  
Is born but of the passion of the chase  
By long unskilful striving. Shall we go  
To-morrow, Sir, to hunt this royal hart,  
And strip him of his antlered majesty  
To deck thy halls.

KING. Nay ! Nay ! He is proclaimed.  
And so, because my chancellor is idle,  
Is king o' the forest.

BECKET. Idle ! Nay, my liege,  
I bring you back a boar, which many a day  
Has held high riot on the country side,  
Uprooting crops, down-treading houses, aye,  
And churches, till the forest where he lay  
Was man-forsaken ; but this fearsome beast  
Is two-legged, tall, and moves articulate tongue.

KING. Richard le Breton ?

BECKET. Aye, my lord ! We heard,  
Some two days since, he harboured in a wood ;  
"This is a noble hunting," so thought I,—

And thus we laid us on his slot, and found  
 A sounder, as I live, sows, piggerlings,  
 A very squeaking brood. So he, the boar,  
 Set his stiff bristles up, and charged at us ;  
 But one or two stout blows have changed him so,  
 That humble as a village ring-snout porker,  
 He grunts submission.

KING. Bid them bring him here.  
 (RICHARD LE BRETON *is brought forward under escort.*)

Is this the man who for so long a day  
 Has breathed oppression, put away all pity,  
 Beating my people down with iron mace,  
 And robbed the fairest dukedom of my realm  
 Of all its beauty ? Art thou knight or squire ?

LE BRETON. A knight, my lord.

KING. Foul fall such chivalry !  
 How long art thou a robber ?

LE BRETON. Since the year  
 That made thee ruler.

KING. Dost thou bandy words !  
 Know'st thou thy life doth tremble on my tongue  
 And quavers to its ending ?

LE BRETON. Nay, my lord !  
 I tremble not,—my life hath lain too long  
 Upon the sword. Yet, e'er thou speak the sentence,  
 Hear me, and I will words of import breathe  
 Into thy secret ear.

KING. Speak on !

LE BRETON. I said  
 Thy *secret* ear.

KING. My lords, I pray you pass  
 Into the castle, I am there anon.  
 (*All turn to leave.*)

Stay, Becket !

LE BRETON. Sir, I speak not if he stay.

KING. Shall I to please thee banish mine own self,  
 My second heart, my truest ear, my friend ;  
 Speak on before my lord the chancellor,  
 Or, by my soul, thou ne'er shall speak again.



LE BRETON. E'en as thou wilt, my lord.

Is not thy style  
Henry the Second, King of England's realm,  
The Duke of Normandy, Count of Toulouse,  
Of Anjou, of Touraine and Gascony,  
Lord of Guienne, of Aquitaine, Poitou,  
Count of La Marche, the Limousin, Auvergne,  
The King almost of France ?

Is Brittany  
So small a corner that thou need'st it not ?

KING. What meanest thou ?

BECKET. Nay ! hear him not, my liege !  
He is a devil, has the devil's tongue  
To tempt to evil.

LE BRETON. Conan is our duke :  
He has an only daughter, thou a son  
To mate with her ; and is my single life  
Too high a price to pay for such success ?

BECKET. My lord, I pray you let this thing go by.

KING. Not so, I have a dream.

LE BRETON. And dreams grow fast  
To great realities.

BECKET. Let it rest a dream.

KING. Stay ! Let me hear him. Who art thou who dar'st  
To so suggest ?

LE BRETON. I, e'en as I stand here,  
Am Conan's brother, under ban of church.

BECKET. And so accursed, thou son of harlot mother,  
Spawn of adultery ! My lord, why waste  
Diamonds on daws ?

LE BRETON (*aside*). Thou shalt have answer, too,  
But not as yet.

KING. If I, as thou supposest,  
Tend to this thing, what is thy pow'r to sway  
Duke Conan's will ?

LE BRETON. My lord, he loves me well  
And trusts me.

(*Aside*). Dost thou smile, lord chancellor ?  
That smile may cost thee dear !

He is so old  
 He dares not venture on the wrack of war ;  
 And so thou wilt befriend him, comfort him,  
 Unto the grave in peace, of what comes after  
 How should he care when sleeping in the tomb ?  
 Give me my life : I will to Brittany,  
 I'am not loved there, but am held in fear,  
 And I will win my lord's and brother's mind  
 Unto this marriage.

BECKET.

Sathanas, avaunt !

Oh ! seest thou not, my lord, the dev'lish wile  
 Glossed over by the smoothness of his tongue ?  
 This man, this so-called knight, a very robber,  
 The murderer of children, whose delight  
 Holds its high revelry in shedding blood,  
 This bastard felon, whose foul footsteps blight  
 The curséd earth which bears him, who has dared  
 To lift his aweless sacrilegious hand  
 Against the sainted ministers of heaven,—

KING. Art thou not hasty, Thomas ?

BECKET.

In good zeal ;—

Who knows no God, no law, save such as binds  
 Thieves unto thieves, would call thee brother thief,  
 And in the hope to mask his knavery  
 Behind the screen of his accomplices,  
 Would make the whole world traitor.

Let him hang,

And sweeten earth although he taint the air.

KING. Nay ! Thomas ! Thomas !

BECKET.

King ! Be thou a king !

Tread no such hidden ways, dare in the light,  
 And of thy daring reap a high reward,  
 But touch not foulness, lest thy hands be foul !  
 Sell not the awful majesty of justice,  
 Thy birthright and thine honour, for a price  
 Paid by a knave !

KING.

A knave may serve a king.

What if a stain of rust be on a sword,  
 E'en of blood-rust, is not the steel as good ?

What if a little blemish soil a crown,  
 The crown is golden ? That the path is dark  
 I know in truth, but must we keep good roads  
 And broad roads only, then we stay at home  
 And watch the others clamber.

BECKET. Hear, my lord !

The kite is caged, and wilt thou set him free,  
 Upon the vain desire and aspiration  
 That he may cut a path in the empty air  
 Unto the eagle's nest ?

KING. Right in the main !

In skilful hand a very kite may serve  
 To strike a heron.

BECKET. Better wring his neck.

LE BRETON (*aside*). Set me my foot upon thy neck, my lord,  
 And I'll disjoint it quick.

BECKET. What is this counsel ?

Naught but was burning in thine heart before,  
 Naught but was patent to a purblind eye !  
 It were not well that such as he should prate  
 Of swaying dukes and kings ;—and over all  
 So vile a thing has not the right to live,  
 A pois'nous toadstool on a dunghill blown ;  
 Crush him amidst his foetor !

KING. Instruments

Are to their uses fitted, swords are noble  
 And pitchforks foul. Enough !

(*To LE BRETON*). Swear thou to me

Obedience and loyal fealty  
 As thy liege lord, and pay upon thy knees  
 Due homage as my vassal, so shalt thou  
 Retain from me thy lordships and thy life.

LE BRETON. I am my lord's most humble willing man  
 In all obedience.

KING. Here ! varlets, here !

Unbind the knight.

(*LE BRETON kneels and places his hands between those of the king.*)

LE BRETON. I, Richard called the Breton,

Lord of Keitvaec, peer of Brittany,  
Do homage to thee, Henry, as liege lord ;  
Thy quarrels are my quarrels, and thy foes  
Are mine, and I am thine, thy knight and man,  
So help me God !

KING. And I accept thine oath.  
Go now and seek some better cheer for thee  
Within the castle.

LE BRETON (*aside*). 'Scaped by a hair ; if ever,  
Becket, it be my turn, see thou to it.  
(*Exit into castle*).

KING. Thomas, art sad ?

BECKET. My lord, this is not well,  
And cannot bear good fruit. Now hast thou sold  
Thy royal majesty and sacred trust :  
How art thou fallen.

KING. Peace, good Becket, peace !  
Am I so foolish, be thou kind to me ;  
If I have fallen do thou stoop to me :  
It is a weary thing to bear the sword.

BECKET. An empty thing to bear the sword in vain !  
There never yet was evil sown is secret,  
But it in secret grew, and waxing tall,  
O'ershadowed ev'ry good, and blasted life  
Like fabled poison-tree ; and this thing shews  
So hideous now, in its own time shall be  
More dang'rous yet. Alas ! a happy age  
Is little safe in lusty manhood's keeping,

KING. Tush, tush, my lord ! Come in and doff thine arms.  
Has aught unwise or wild 'twixt thee and me  
Stood from the earliest days, when Theobald,  
The old archbishop, brought thee in his train :—  
Dost thou remember ?—On a limping horse,  
His cloak for saddle, rode a careworn scholar,  
His face as long as here to the castle gate,  
And pinched and worn.

BECKET. A very dolorous squire,  
So hungry-looking that the yapping curs  
Begged not of him,—in suit of rusty gray;—

KING. With something in his face which shewed him trusty,

And something in his heart that called me friend :  
Cans't thou remember ?

**B**ECKET.                               Aye ! my gracious lord ;  
And that same trusty heart is ever thine ;  
Though thou be king and I a thing of naught,  
Ever betwixt us is a noble friendship.

KING. Yes ! and so shall be.

BECKET. As I pray, my lord.

(Exit KING into castle.)

BECKET. How is't he loves me? In a meaner man  
'Twere policy or statecraft to become  
The bosom friend of England's chancellor;  
But Henry, were he knave or English thrall,  
Might never stoop to gather fortune thus.  
Aye! he does love me! For some skill in chase,  
Some silly ease to aim the feathered shaft,  
Some service done him in the shock of war;  
'Tis strange; and I love him,—e'en at his worst,  
When rage unchecked, may-be invincible,  
Distorts his better senses, as the blood,  
Which in another man had swelled the cheek,  
Confined within the furnace of his heart  
Leaves all his visage wax. Hath friendship chains  
To knit the poles? More deep than ocean seas,  
Higher than mountains, huger than the earth  
Parts him and me.

(Enter RANULPH DE BROC. They bow.)

Here's one who would be my friend.

RANULPH. Give you good den, my lord.

BECKET. To you, my lord.

RANULPH. I pray

How fares the king ?

BECKET.                   The queen!

RANULPH.                               The king, my lord !

BECKET. As well as thou wilt let him, better far  
Than thou could'st wish him.

RANULPH. Nay, my lord, not so !

I honour and I love the king.

BECKET.                   The queen !

RANULPH. But more

Would serve thy lordship : my poor arm and aid  
Are ever at thy service,—for thy smile  
I would adventure aught.

BECKET. I need thee not.

RANULPH. Most gentle lord, a very sorry answer  
To one who offers thee——

BECKET. That I would not.

RANULPH (*aside*). Open report and common rumour runs  
That some mad fancy has possessed the king  
To throne this man archbishop—it were well  
If I could earliest win some favour from him.  
My lord !

BECKET. I hear thee not.

RANULPH. Why scorn  
My heartfelt homage ?

BECKET. Out upon the dross !  
Give thou thy homage where thy heart is giv'n,  
And look the king be deaf and blind against  
That homage and thy treason ! Go, my lord,  
Go where thou are desired !

RANULPH (*aside*). May Fortune's wheel  
Swiftly and sudden send thee rolling down ;  
Be mine the hand to give the starting push  
To thine abasement. (*Exit RANULPH.*)

BECKET. Foul ! Foul ! Oh, most foul !  
Louis the first perchance, then Saladin,  
Then Geoffrey comes, and Henry Geoffrey's son,  
And now a nameless and unnumbered host  
Of whom this man is held the titular chief :  
And she the Queen ! Not Poitou nor Guienne,  
Nor all the crowns of all her dukedoms giv'n  
To mate the crown of England, can erase  
The stain is bound within her wedding ring.  
Pass, thou uncleanly fraud ! It matters not,  
For if not thou, another : 'Tis not love,  
This thing without a name, for love I knew :  
Knew, suffered, slew, and laid it in the grave,  
The barren grave, of all that might have been.

## ACT I.

SCENE II.—*The Queen's bower at Falaise.*

(The Queen seated, her ladies about her.)

1ST LADY (*reading*). "And thus he, soiled in 'scutcheon, name  
Dishonoured died for her who loved him not." [and arms

QUEEN. Enough, Alicia :—'tis a piteous tale,  
And one to be remembered ;—close the book.  
This spring air breeds in me a drowsiness  
Which will not be denied,—a little while,  
I pray you, leave me.

LADIES (*rising*). Madam ! (*Exeunt.*)

QUEEN. Ladies !—Ah !

At last alone ! Their little childish babble  
Frets me to rage ! Spotless Sir Galahad !  
Spotless forsooth ! And false Sir Launcelot !  
I could not love him : Fool, he would be loved !  
Their timid rivulet of poor conceits  
Mocks at the ocean of a passionate love.  
And Guinevere so sad ! It sickens me !  
Sad she, when she was loved by such a man.  
Pale chattering jays ! Is not a step on the stair ?  
Hist ! Ranulph ! Ranulph ! Wherefore comes he not ?  
Has Henry wakened from his am'rous dream  
Of her has last usurped fair Clifford's place  
To play the jealous ? Tush ! He has Guienne  
And all the duchies of my appanage ;  
He wants no more. Hark ! Hark ! A step at last !  
'Tis he ! Ranulph !

(*Enter RANULPH DE BROU by a secret door.*)

RANULPH. My Queen !

QUEEN. No more than that ?

RANULPH. All that thou wilt when fitter time shall serve ;  
Now nought but warning. Becket hath learned our tale.

QUEEN. Becket hath learned our tale ! The man-at-arms  
 With head as thick as is his battle-helm ;  
 A hunter with an eye for hawks and hounds,  
 The savage lord who never loved a woman,  
 Shall he guess aught that I would hold concealed ?

RANULPH. Madam, he spies us.

QUEEN. Nay ! Thou art bewrought !  
 Am I a tiercel that he eye my flight ?

RANULPH. But now I met him, said " How fares the king ? "  
 " The queen " said he, and in continuance  
 Girded at thee ; " Go " at the last he said,  
 " Go, where thou art desired."

QUEEN. Art sure of this ?

RANULPH. Mine own ears heard it.

QUEEN. Said he more ?

RANULPH. Aye ! more ;  
 But not so much his speech had poison in't  
 As had the speaking, something in his voice,  
 His look, his gesture.

QUEEN. Yes ! I know the man :  
 He bears an eloquence in ev'ry limb :  
 Spoke he in whispers ?

RANULPH. Nay ! That all might hear.

QUEEN. In the open court ?

RANULPH. In the open light of day.

QUEEN. Was any there ?

RANULPH. Nay, none !

QUEEN. It matters naught  
 Since his intent the same, to blemish me.  
 Shall ev'ry low-born braggart whom the king  
 May chance to choose, be free to point his jest  
 With any royal name ; shall sparrows chirp  
 Scorn at an eagle ?

RANULPH. Madam, have a care !  
 Becket is chancellor, perhaps archbishop.

QUEEN. Ha ! Is it so ? Whence hast it ?

RANULPH. Wide repute  
 Declares it true.

QUEEN. The greater be his fall.



RANULPH. The king's best friend.

QUEEN. The king—thou stumblest there ?

RANULPH. I pause, lest I should stumble.

QUEEN. How hast thou

A thousand times entreated me to show

Some deed of emprise, some most hazardous stroke,

In doing which thine arm should prove thy love :

Kill Becket !

RANULPH. Lest he warn the king ?

QUEEN. Not so !

He will not. His is not a courtier's tongue

To fame dishonour. Kill him, that he dared

Lightly to speak of me.

Hist ! Some one comes !

Get thee behind the arras ! When thou may'st

Pass from the chamber ; we will meet anon.

LADY. The Empress, madam !

(*Enter Empress MAUD.*)

QUEEN. Welcome, lady mother !

EMPRESS. My blessing on thee.

QUEEN. Pray thee, madam, sit.

EMPRESS. Aye ! Having much to say. I am not old,

But ere my age my toils have weakened me,

And these same feet which bore me swift from ill,

Now scarce can creep upon their way to heaven.

QUEEN. God keep thee with us, madam !

EMPRESS. Nay, my daughter ;

Pray rather that His goodness give me rest !

A weary road has this poor body travelled,

And suffered strangely. Ere my childhood passed

A German Empress ;—in my riper years

An English prisoner and England's queen,

Ruler to-day, a fugitive to-morrow ;

And ever forced, for honour of my race,

To play a manly part in woman's weeds.

QUEEN. And ever great in thy most fell misfortune,

Grand in thy majesty of ill-success ;

A queen discrowned, but still in all a queen !

Madam, we honour thee.

EMPRESS.                      Tush! Tush! The gaud  
Of this world's honour mocks my withered brow,  
And all the end my weary life has won  
Is this, to wish it ended, to repose  
Upon the bosom of our mother Church.

QUEEN (*aside*). How doth herself belie her: soul of fire  
And heart of steel, she rests but in the grave.

EMPRESS. But not as yet : I bear a thought about me  
Which as I pray infects my very prayers  
With human longing.

QUEEN (*aside*). It was ever so.  
A little time to earth, then all to heaven.

EMPRESS. 'Tis this that haunts me; Henry is the king  
And needs me not, but he the fair-haired boy,  
My gentle William, darling of my age,  
Is landless, poor as any petty knight  
Who sells his sword for wages.

QUEEN. He who is  
Richer in blood than gold is poor indeed.

EMPRESS. More wretched than a beggar, whose estate  
Lies in another's purse ;--he dares not ask  
And silent has not.

QUEEN. But thy plan ?

EMPRESS. 'Tis this ;  
De Warrenne, Earl of Sussex, has a daughter,  
A child as yet, sole heiress of his name ;  
Noble by birth she is, the Conqueror  
Her sire as ours.

QUEEN. A scheme most excellent !

EMPRESS. Aye ! but it limps : for this same strain of blood,  
Which makes her not unworthy of my son,  
Is by the Church adjudged to be too near.

QUEEN. The Church! Whence hast this, madam?

EMPRESS. From the king.

QUEEN. And whence had he !

EMPRESS. From Becket.

QUEEN. Ah !

EMPEROR. The man

Of all the world he trusts:—too much methinks—

I like it not, to give the helm of state  
Unto so vile direction.

QUEEN. Becket saith—— ?

EMPRESS. Naught that can matter, being what he is,  
Rather a boon-companion to the king  
Than holding weighty office.

QUEEN. Hast not heard

The king's intent ?

EMPRESS. Of Becket ?

QUEEN. Aye ! He means  
That this same boon-companion be the Primate.

EMPRESS. What ? Thomas Becket, half a Saracen,  
Wholly a churl, an upstart mongrel knave !  
Shall hands which might be proud to hold a stirrup  
Uprear the crozier of the noblest see  
Of Christendom ?

QUEEN. Such is the royal purpose.

EMPRESS. It shall not be !

QUEEN. Madam, the bitterest hate  
Born in thy bosom of this ill-starred news  
Ranks not with mine.

EMPRESS. Hate him ! May ev'ry curse  
Mine age hath heard beat down and break upon him !  
Peace ! Peace ! He dare not.

QUEEN. Madam, he dares all :  
And, once installed on Canterbury's throne,  
Is out of reach ; like Jove himself shall sit  
Above our heads, with awful lightnings armed.

EMPRESS. Now is the palace of my fondest dreams  
Crumbled to dust.

QUEEN. To dust, if Becket live.

EMPRESS. Alas, that I the daughter of a king,  
And a king's mother, live to see this day !  
Now is the fav'rite flower of my intent,  
With happy promise od'rous, in the bud  
Choked by this parasite !—A very weed,  
Uplifted from the mire of London streets,  
The ranker for its breeding !—Let us hence !  
Hence to the king !

QUEEN. Madam, if my poor aid  
 Can aught advise thee, or can aught relieve,  
 'Tis thine for asking :—Though indeed I fear  
 The serpent Becket hath such poison breathed  
 Into my husband's ear, that love hath died  
 Upon the hearing.

EMPRESS. Daughter, let us go !

QUEEN. Go thou, and I will follow : so the king  
 Shall deem us each moved by particular zeal,  
 And not by compact :—He, would drive a nail,  
 Presses not once with all his utmost strength,  
 But with successive strokes he taps it in  
 And fixes firmly. *(Exit Empress.)*

I,—what is't to me,  
 That William languishes for lack of gold ?  
 But ev'ry tool must do a shovel's work  
 When one would mine. The king will not give way,  
 I know it well ! Yet never seed was sown  
 But something sprang of it, and this, so barren,  
 So wild a hope, may yield me vengeance yet.

END OF SCENE II.—ACT I.

## ACT I.

SCENE III.—*The great hall in the castle, Falaise.*

(DE LUCI and DE MORVILLE.)

DE LUCI. The king holds fast.

DE MORVILLE. Aye ! with a royal hand.

DE LUCI. Six castles, said'st thou ?

DE MORVILLE. Aye ! Six noble castles :  
 The bishop prayed him stay and hear him out,

Twisting excuses and apologies  
 Into a rope should draw him from his purpose ;  
 But Henry smiled and said, " Lord Winchester,  
 Give unto each his own, to me the sword,  
 To thee the cross ; pray thou, and I will strike !

DE LUCI. A very wise young king.

DE MORVILLE. Seest thou not now,  
 How, like a charioteer with two hot horses,  
 He checks the one with the other ; doth the Church  
 Fret at his biting, loosens he a little  
 The Barons' rein ;—should the great lords of state  
 Kick at the weighty draught, he whips the Church  
 Till stretch the traces even.

DE LUCI. Ruling both  
 With heavy hand.

DE MORVILLE. Aye ! Since the nobles bore  
 But ill the scutage, and if pressed had dared  
 Even rebellion, made he the burden light  
 By the unwilling alms of Mother Church.

DE LUCI. But how if Church and State should seize the bit,  
 Uniting in their majesty of might  
 Against this one man's strength ; can he withhold  
 The madd'ning rush, the swift catastrophe ?

DE MORVILLE. Aye ! Let them strain as they list ! The king  
 By love of England's people, by his race, [is king  
 Having some colour of the Confessor's blood ;  
 For English churls and yeomen cling to him,  
 'Gainst Norman earls and Norman bishops 'friend him,  
 And hold the crown of England in their hands.

DE LUCI. But how comes it that thou a Norman born  
 Lovest this English king ?

DE MORVILLE. For his own self :  
 E'en for his sudden rage and swift repentance ;  
 Aye ! for his hasty words and fiery heart,  
 And for his gay glad spirit and his laugh,  
 His fearless front in battle :—Can I tell ?  
 I am the king's man :—Should he order aught,  
 Were it to dare, to suffer or to strike,  
 Here is a hand is his, a head, a heart,

E'en to damnation's end !

DE LUCI.

Here comes the king.

*(Enter KING attended.)*

KING. Well met, de Luci ! I have news for thee.

De Morville, welcome here.

DE MORVILLE.

To serve your highness.

KING. My lords, I have some trouble in my heart :

Whilst we are feasting here in restful ease,  
The Welsh, like wolves emboldened by their famine,  
Have burst the barriers of their hungry hills,  
And, howling for their prey, have rent the folds  
Of Western England.

DE LUCI.

Press they forward, sir ?

KING. Aye ! Like a rising tide, so reads the tale,  
Racing against each other, wave on wave ;  
Chester stands fast, and with its walls of stone  
Breasts the rough breakers back ; but o'er the marches  
They rage and raven ankle-deep in blood.

DE LUCI. Will not my lord go thither ?

KING.

Nay ! My charge

Lies for the present here. The eye of France  
Is ever watchful for occasion given,  
Or guard relaxed. De Luci, thou shalt go,  
And thou, de Morville. Rouse the country-side,  
Call out my vassals, levy men-at-arms,  
And hurl this naked horde of robbers back  
Into their naked mountains ;—bind them there  
By such conditions as their poverty  
Or fear may furnish !

DE LUCI.

All our aim, my lord,

Shall be to serve thee truly in this charge.

KING. I know it, Luci : never man had friend—

*(Enter BECKET.)*

Ah, Thomas, art thou there ? Come hither, Sir !  
I have to speak with thee. Wilt pity me ?  
Wilt thank ?

BECKET.

Both if needs be, my lord.

KING. Pity then first ! Two weary wasted hours

My loving queen and yet more loving mother

Preached me of thee a dreary homily.  
 Fear not! I would not if I could repeat  
 One half their concert.

BECKET. Sir, what said the queen?

KING. Ambitious art thou, Thomas, so she said,  
 And treach'rous, Thomas, and unscrupulous;  
 A very snake to warm beside the hearth,  
 And sting the hand that saved thee: such a thing  
 As, if a man shall duly love his life  
 Is scotched and killed:—a greedy carrion-crow  
 She called thee, Thomas, feeding on the foulest  
 If it may make him fat,—and so much more  
 As wearies me to think of.

BECKET. And, my lord,  
 What saidst thou?

KING. I?—I yawned. The Empress then  
 Took up the tale: A low-born upstart knave,  
 And fitter for a dishclout than the Pallium.  
 Now is it out! Dost guess the reason on't?

BECKET. The Pallium?

KING. Aye! The Pallium! My intent  
 Was to have worked thy curiosity  
 And slowly ope'd the question;—but it out,  
 Popped like a rabbit.—Wilt thou then, or no?

BECKET. My lord!—I pray thee—'tis a serious thing;  
 And well to be considered.

KING. Thomas Becket,  
 Wilt thou or wilt thou not, old cherished friend,  
 Take from my hand the see of Canterbury?

BECKET. I cannot, good my lord.

KING. Nay! Here's no reason.

BECKET. My lord, 'tis jest.

KING. Thou art a churchman.

BECKET. Aye,  
 A churchman—look at me—is this the head  
 To bear a mitre? Will the sober monks  
 Of Canterbury take this gaudy thing  
 To fill their throne?—Set me aside, my lord!  
 Deck me in steel, give me a hundred knights,

And I will lay my spear in rest with any,  
 Aye ! or with all thy foes ;—bid me to ride  
 Beside thee in the chase, I'll do my best  
 To be the foremost ;—bid me laugh with thee,  
 Jest with thee, serve thee, aye ! or die for thee,  
 Thou'lt never ask too much !

KING. Oh thou true heart !  
 How long a time is it since first we met ?  
 What matters ? I, a stripling when thou camest,  
 Loved thee, and man I love thee ! All these years  
 Have we not borne one heart the each to other,  
 And loved with such a love as is most rare ?  
 Such love the evil-haunted race of Anjou  
 Ne'er knew before ; by some descended curse  
 Each brother hates his brother, husband wife,  
 And father son.

BECKET. My lord, should I accept  
 This offered honour, such a wall would grow  
 'Twixt thee and me as not the love of years,  
 Nor memory of kindness, nor the might  
 Of truest friendship ere might learn to scale :  
 A wall of glass, of such distorting power  
 That none should know the other's face ; each deed,  
 Whate'er the thought that prompted it, would show  
 Fell as a murder :—not one word of mine  
 Would ever reach thee truly.

KING. Thomas, hear me !  
 A year has passed since hoary Theobald  
 Went to his rest. Through all this year I pondered :  
 And here stand I, a royal kingly hart,  
 Sore set upon and pressed by two great hounds,  
 The Church, the Barons :—Sweeping wide around  
 With my huge antlers have I cleared such space  
 As suits my grandeur ;—But they bay me close !  
 Take thou the Church's leash within thine hand,  
 Shall I not vanquish the unaided lords ?

BECKET. My lord, the question is not so resolved,  
 As thou desirest and would'st fain believe :  
 Give me the leash of the Church, it is my duty



To cheer her on, to aid her, at her need  
To shield her from thine antler. Can the hart  
Forbear to blame the hunter ?

KING. By heav'n the thing shall be !  
I am not used to crossing, in despite  
Of mine own will.

BECKET. It cannot be, my lord.

KING. It must and shall be ! Or, by the eyes of God,  
I'll strip thee to thy rags, and hunt thee hence !

JOHN OF PAVIA. My lord ! My lord ! Learn patience to thy  
When was a man, worthy the name of man, [heat :  
Bent from his purpose by a scolding tongue ?  
Becket, a word with thee.

KING. Becket ! Old friend !  
Forgive me ! I am hot—thou art so hard,  
So stern and cold ; 'gainst thee I lash myself  
Into such foaming waves of impotent fury  
As pours the northern sea upon the ice,  
And to as small an end. Speak thou, Lord Legate,  
If he will hear.

BECKET. My lord, I am all ears.

PAVIA. That thou art called to this so high estate  
Is not a little thing of man's device,  
To be at ease dismissed or shrugged away :  
I see here somewhat of the hand of Heaven,  
Guiding thy way uplift against thy will ;  
And our most holy father of the Church,  
In whose great name I speak, bids me advise  
That if this be a cross, thou bear the cross.

BECKET. My lord, I am not worthy.

PAVIA. Worthy ! Alas !  
Is any worthy ? Has any strength enough  
To bear this perilous weight in perilous times ?  
But courage, Thomas !—

BECKET. Courage, my lord, I have,  
And confidence, save only in myself.

PAVIA. That shall be given thee. Hear then my charge ;  
Is any weak, see that thou shelter him,  
Is any sad, 'tis thine to comfort him !—

BECKET. Aye ! so much, as I am.

PAVIA. As thou shalt be,  
Yet more !—For England and for England's Church,  
Against the stern oppression of the mighty,  
Be thou a bulwark ; clothe thine outward heart  
With rigid iron, be all love within !  
Place thyself foremost in the deadly van,  
And make thy breast a corslet for the poor :  
Is any threatened, turn the shaft on thee !  
Rule as a saint the kingdom of the meek,  
Humblest of all thyself !

BECKET. My lord, my life  
Was not attuned thus ; rather it ran  
In tripping numbers of the chase or war,  
In bravery of garments and of arms.  
I am no monk : How shall the cloistered cowl  
Whisper at one half soldier and half groom.

PAVIA. Is it for us to choose the instrument,  
Or, being chosen, to deny our place ?  
Becket, go forth ! Be strong to guide the Church !  
'Tis she who calls thee ; gird thyself to work !  
Be glad, as I, that on no meaner man  
Her choice has fallen.

BECKET. Meaner could not be !  
Such as I am, I yield me to the task ;  
May Heav'n, has raised me over my deserts,  
Such as I would be give me grace to grow !

DE LUCI (*to the king.*) Is this thing true I hear, my lord, that  
Hast of thy favour purposed to ordain [thou  
Becket as primate ?

KING. It is true, my lord.

DE LUCI. I like it not.

KING. How now, my lord ! Shall I  
Enquire the private mood of ev'ry baron  
Ere I give place to any officer ?  
What is't against the man ?

DE LUCI. Against the man,  
Nothing : against the priest as he shall be  
A thousand faults.

KING. What now ?

DE LUCI. He is too strong ;  
Too set in his opinions to give up  
A jot, a tittle, of his Church's pride.

KING. Whom wilt thou then ?

DE LUCI. There is at home in England  
One Gilbert Foliot—

KING. A very sapless fool—

DE LUCI. Bishop of London—

KING. By some accident ;  
But never more.

DE LUCI. He hoped to gain the throne—

KING. So much the more a fool.

DE LUCI. Will he give way ?

KING. He shall !

DE LUCI. Roger, my liege, the lord of York,  
Of olden grudge hates Thomas Becket well ;  
There will be strife anon.

KING. Let quarrels come !  
Becket can guard his head.

(To JOHN OF PAVIA.) How hast thou sped ?  
Has eloquence, the statesman's battering ram,  
Prevailed against the portals of his ears,  
And taught his heart surrender ?

PAVIA. Nay, my lord,  
Thou know'st not Becket yet ! No engine of war  
Had shocked to yielding his opinion's walls :  
Nay, rather stole I in, a messenger,  
Whisp'ring some words of high self-abnegation,  
And now the castle parleys.

BECKET. Yields itself  
Rescue or no rescue !—My lord the king,  
Since firmly to this undesiréd end  
Is bent the iron bow of thine intent,  
Needs must the quarrel fly :—yet well beware,  
Lest that the missile falling,—fall it must,—  
Work not upon thyself such fatal ill  
As Harold found at Hastings !—Lift me up  
If so thou wilt ;—not thy whole realm in arms

Can stay me there,—nor guide me as I fall.

KING. Wilt thou accept the office ?

BECKET. Aye, my lord !

But with no word of thanks, for such a charge  
Hast thou for my good service laid on me,  
As clean forbids me ever serve thee more.

KING. Thou dost accept ?

BECKET. Against my wiser will.

I, Thomas Becket, London citizen,  
Do of the hands of this my lord, king Henry,  
Receive the feudal rights and mitred see  
Of Canterbury.

KING. I have some matter yet :

To-morrow at thine earliest set thy face,  
With Hugh de Morville and de Luci here,  
Unto my kingdom and thy new-found see ;  
For that most pestilent friend, the king of France,  
Late my sworn enemy, (may be again),  
Claims that so much the recent treaty hold  
As crowns my son a king at Westminster.  
(To BECKET.) This is thy duty. Thou, de Luci, bear  
To Canterbury's monks their king's advice  
That they confirm his choosing.

DE LUCI. Good my lord,

I pray thee name another messenger ;  
I have no skill in churchwork.

KING. Hear me, Sir !

Wilt thou with all thine heart and all thy might  
Secure the crowning of my son Lord Henry ?

DE LUCI. My lord, with ev'ry strain of all my strength.

KING. See that thou use the self-same diligence

To win the monks to their obedience,  
And at thy peril fail in this or that :  
For, by the eyes of God, I hold no less  
To Becket's mitre than to Henry's crown.

(*Servants rush in shouting "The hart ! The king's hart !"*)

(*GRIMM dragged in, bound.*)

What have we here ?

ROLAND. My lord ! The hart is slain !

KING. Is slain ! What hart ?

ROLAND.                               The hart thy mercy spared,  
That which, by right of royal proclamation,  
No man may hurt and live.

KING.   Is this the man  
Who slew it ?

ROLAND.                               Aye, my lord !

GRIMM.   Not so, my lord !  
I slew it not.

KING.                               Where is thy proof ? (*To ROLAND.*)

ROLAND.   My lord,  
Here stands Gilles Walter, his the tale to tell.

KING (*to GILLES*). Speak on !

1ST HUNTSMAN.                       My lord !—I—I

KING.   Speak out !

ROLAND.   Thou fool !

Out with it pat !—A very timid man,  
My lord ;—but now within the buttery  
His tongue clacked on as mill-wheels after rain.

KING. Lead him to speak.

ROLAND.                               Here, Gilles—friend Gilles—alack !  
Is thy tongue rusty ?

1ST HUNTSMAN.                       My lord the king, I rose  
Out of my bed at daybreak, fed the dogs—  
(Old Trusty ate but little—)

ROLAND.   Tush, thou fool !  
Get on ! Get on !

1ST HUNTSMAN.                       What would his highness hear ?  
At noon I saw the royal company  
Sweep by me, and I thought—

ROLAND.   No matter that !  
Come to the deer !

1ST HUNTSMAN.                       Oh ! my poor wandering wits !  
Where would'st thou have me ?

ROLAND.   Come to the deer, I say !  
Know'st thou this man ?

1ST HUNTSMAN.                       No !

ROLAND.   Hast seen him ?

1ST HUNTSMAN.   Yes !

ROLAND. Where ?

1ST HUNTSMAN. In the forest.

ROLAND. When ?

1ST HUNTSMAN. This eventide,

Nigh at about the setting of the sun,

And he was sitting on a mossy stone,

And by him lay a knife—this knife, my lord.

ROLAND. The deer !—

1ST HUNTSMAN. Lay dead not ten short paces off,

Its weasand slit by no unskilful hand.

KING. And said he naught ?

1ST HUNTSMAN. Nothing, my lord, till I

Laid hand to hold him,—then he rose up slow,

As half-asleep and stiffened by long sitting,

Saying, “What matters it ? As well this way

As by another.”

BECKET. Was there blood on the knife ?

KING. Aye ! Was there blood ?

ROLAND. Two sturdy digs in the earth

Had cleaned all that.

KING. Sirrah, what hast to say ?

GRIMM. Nothing, my lord.

KING. How ! Nothing ?

BECKET. Dear my lord,

Let me, I pray thee, reason with this man :

Who art thou ?

GRIMM. One who living is accursed,

And so that death come cares not much by whom.

BECKET. Tell me thy tale.

GRIMM. My lord, it is too long.

BECKET. Whence art thou ?

GRIMM. London bore me,—Grimm my name,

A clerk of Cambridge.

KING. Didst thou kill the deer ?

GRIMM. I did not.

1ST HUNTSMAN. I will swear it !—See, my lord :

The deer lay here as 'twere' and he sat there—

KING. A very knavish clerk ! Come, sirrah, speak !

I swear nor gown nor tonsure shall deliver

Such as thou art—Speak, sirrah, speak or hang !

GRIMM. And if a prey to hunger's madd'ning pangs,  
I had beyond my will grown desperate,  
And seeing live flesh, good flesh, pass me by,  
Thrust to the hilt again, again ; can any  
Say that to spare a hart a man should starve ?

KING. Nay ! Having slain the hart, thou hangest, sir.

GRIMM. I slew him not.

KING. Past patience, sir ! Go to !

Away with this so wordy prating cur,  
And hang him from the topmost battlement.

BECKET. My lord, he is a clerk.

KING. An honest clerk !

Sniffing for venison : Nay ! I warrant me,  
He is more skilled, my lord, to twang a bow  
Than whine at matins. Take him hence and hang !

BECKET. My lord, the Church must judge her erring sons.

KING. What has the Church to judge of hart of grease ?

Is ev'ry stalwart knave may chance to read,  
Or spell, or splutter through his breviary,  
To have for this the right of forestry ?

BECKET. The Church's hand is heavy.

KING. Aye ! But slow.

What ! Shall this knave be judged by mother Church,  
To read ten Credos, patter an Ave, fast  
From flesh a fortnight ? Nay ! By the eyes of God,  
He tastes no flesh again !

BECKET. My lord, the Church

Is like a loving mother, chastens oft  
In sorrow, not in anger ; lays her hand  
To kill the sin, but in her mercy yields  
Some leisure for repentance.

KING. Aye ! Too much !

Why waste we words on such a knave as this ?  
He hangs ! *(Is going.)*

BECKET. My lord ! I pray thee by the love

Which all these years have bound us, ere I go,  
Grant me a boon, give me this forfeit life.

KING. Aye ! Take him, body and bones ! Come, come, my  
We waste the precious hour. Here ! Music ! Wine ! [lords,

(*All sit at table except GRIMM and BECKET. Music.*)

BECKET. Didst thou slay the deer ?

GRIMM. Not I, my lord.

BECKET. Go ! I believe thee ! Hie thee to my steward  
And ride with me to-morrow.

GRIMM. Gracious master !

For life I thank thee not ; mine is a poor,  
A tarnished remnant ; but thou hast believed  
My word for speaking, and in after years  
My gratitude shall fruit in deeds not words.

(*Exit GRIMM.*)

BECKET. Out of what marvels of unlikely metals  
Doth Heaven fashion tools to serve its ends,  
And by how strange a round of circumstance  
Are great deeds fathered ! Here stand I, a man  
Born to no favour, fostered by no power,  
Pushed to the air of courts to be a thing  
Of gilded frippery and jesting words,  
To sit a-horse beside my royal master,  
And serve his ev'ry purpose : In an hour  
He who was glad to make the table laugh,  
Must learn his eyes to weep with those who weep ;  
He who was proud to lead the foremost war  
Must doff the iron helmet for the cowl :  
And all my life to be must give the lie  
To all I was. Yet was I true indeed,  
Aye ! So I am ! And steel is steel, as sword  
Or ploughshare !—Noble England ! Hear me swear !  
Through all his life, though death his guerdon be,  
Becket shall stand betwixt thy foes and thee !

END OF ACT I.



## ACT II.

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SCENE I. (A.D. 1164)—*A room in Becket's lodgings at Northampton.*

(BECKET seated in an attitude of depression : After a pause he rings a bell. Enter HERBERT DE BOSHAM.)

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HERBERT. Did my lord summon?

BECKET. Aye! Bring hither to me  
The letter of his holiness the Pope  
Anent the fatal Acts of Clarendon. (*Exit HERBERT.*)

BECKET. Oh, Clarendonum! Better were it's name  
Writ *Cleri damnum*;—since the pow'rs of hell  
Gat hold upon me there! Would that these lips,  
Ere I had fashioned them to such assent,  
Were blistered to the gums! More weak than Esau,  
I, that am shepherd of the sheep of Heav'n,  
Sold my flock's pasture for a royal smile;  
The Church's head, to please a king forsooth,  
Dared mortgage all the kingdom of the Church,  
And bade her sit a handmaid 'neath the throne!  
(*Enter HERBERT and GRIMM.*)

The bargain shall not hold! That which I did  
Was wrought in sin:—some angel stayed my hand  
Ere I had sealed the deed.

GRIMM. And thus, my lord,  
Bore thee off scathless.

BECKET. Nay! There is the stain,  
The scandal to my name, that I have giv'n  
My word, and will not keep it.

GRIMM. But the seal ?

Refused ! 'Tis that which stamps the deed,  
And that is not.

BECKET. And that shall never be !

This letter of his Holiness directs  
That I shall yield so much unto the king  
As may be given, saying privilege  
And credit of our order.

HERBERT. Will not that

Suffice king Henry ?

BECKET. Nay ! Nor ten times so much !

He wills that ev'ry tittle of my office  
Shall filter through his hands and take of them  
A new direction ; so the Church whose rule  
Has guided sanctity, protected learning,  
Must at his bidding sink to be the slave  
Of royal tyranny.

GRIMM. Thou wilt not yield ?

BECKET. I ! Yield ! Nay, never ! For honour of the Church

Dishonour I myself to be a liar :

I, who have ne'er withdrawn my plighted word,  
Nor ever checked to serve its full intent,  
Renounce it clean :—I would not, had I sworn  
To do this thing, so vilify my office  
To mine own ease. Come scandal, calumny,  
Death, or a prison, as I am, I stand.

HERBERT. Though all belie thee now, in future time

Thy name shall hold the love of all good men.

BECKET. Enough ! If any from the king demand,

Yield them admittance.

*(Exeunt HERBERT and GRIMM.)*

Yes ! Most strange it was

How at the moment that I held the seal  
Poised to impress, some messenger of heav'n  
Seemed to arrest my hand :—Be false my word,  
My human word, but be the sacred sign  
Of Canterbury's see unsullied still.

*(Enter HERBERT.)*

HERBERT. My lord, there come some envoys from the king.

BECKET. Admit them.

(*Enter the* EARL OF CORNWALL, *the* EARL OF LEICESTER,  
RICHARD DE LUCI, *and* HUGH DE MORVILLE.)

Dear, my lords, I greet you kindly.

ALL. Our greetings to thee.

BECKET. Come ye from the king ?

LEICESTER. His highness sends us ; furthermore, desires

That our discourse, how poor soe'er may be  
Our rend'ring, have the like respect from thee,  
As though the king himself did speak the words.

BECKET. My lord, I honour you, both for yourselves,  
And in your office.

LEICESTER. Thus our messago runs :

Touching the sometime Acts of Clarendon,  
We Henry, King of England, to thee Thomas,  
Archbishop, greeting, charge thee that to-day  
Before the assembled bishops, lords, and peers,  
Within our royal castle at Northampton,  
Thou do appear, and publicly affix,  
In order due, the seal of Canterbury  
To these ordained and settled constitutions.

BECKET. My lord, bear back my answer to the king,  
As Balaam's unto Balak ; I will come.

CORNWALL. Peace to thy jesting ! Shall my lord the king  
List to such jargon of the troubadours ?

BECKET (*aside*). (Again a miracle, the ass hath spoken.)

Thus is my message ; come I surely will,  
But that is given me that must I speak,  
And as appointed me so shall I do.

CORNWALL. To me the matter is not dim : 'The king  
Requires thy seal ;—then give it !

BECKET. Noble lord,

I am not here to offer explanation,  
Nor thou to ask it. Bear unto the king  
My answer.

LEICESTER. Thomas, I have known thee long,  
And ever loved thee,—now no matter why ;—  
Bethink thee that this message has no promise  
Of peace for thee or comfort for the king.

'Tis hard, I know, to so abate thy pride  
 As suits the royal humour ;—have not I,  
 In mine own fortune, felt the fendal hand  
 Press heavy on me ? But, regard this thing  
 From what aspect you may, it's only end,  
 Though years of strife and hot contention swell  
 It's dire duration, is at last to yield.

BECKET. My lord, those years may grow eternity,  
 And find me still the same.

LEICESTER. Oh, stubborn heart !  
 Who art thou, that thou standest 'gainst the king,  
 Against the peers, e'en 'gainst thy brother priests ;  
 Are thou so strong to stand thyself alone ?

BECKET. Even as Joseph's sheaf amongst his brothers'  
 Stood upright.

LEICESTER, Yield thou must ! As well to-day  
 As then, whenc'er it be :—the longer held  
 The harder losing pow'r.

BECKET. I shall not yield !  
 Touching this question of thine own, thou gavest  
 Something of thine, thy children's, some estate  
 By royal hand bestowed and now resumed :  
 My case stands not so ; what the king hath sown  
 That let him reap ;—'twas mine, 'tis his, I give it.

LEICESTER. Thou yielddest, then ?

BECKET. Nay, never ! What he craves  
 Is neither mine to give nor his to take ;  
 The timeworn honour of our holy Church,  
 The rule of Christendom, the sacred rights,  
 The charge to guard the weak, and check the strong ;  
 These are the might and majesty of Heav'n,  
 And may not thus be passed from man to man.

DE LUCI. Must not the Church, like a well-ordered army,  
 Include within her strength all ranks of men  
 United by obedience ? Can the war,  
 We daily wage against the Paynim world,  
 Prevail unless we fight with discipline ?  
 Some must be subject ; should the masses rule,  
 Where were the followers ?

BECKET. 'Twixt thy thought and mine

Interpretation only builds a wall :  
 I hold this true ; nay ! more, the very truth ;  
 In all is earthly serve an earthly king ;  
 Be loyal to the death ! But this I add,  
 In all is closest to the heart, and lies  
 Within our higher nature, all that lifts  
 The man above the brute, the germ immortal  
 Which frets within this mortal prison-house,  
 In high desires, in noble aims and ends,  
 By so much of our pow'r as frees the slave,  
 By so much of our wealth as aids the poor,  
 In Faith, in Hope, in Truth, and Charity,  
 Serve we another,—Him who made the king !

DE MORVILLE. Listen then, thou, who dar'st to set at naught  
 The royal statutes and the king's commands ;  
 These hands, these arms, these bodies, are the king's,  
 And we are ready at his word to right  
 His ev'ry wrong, and work whate'er he will.  
 What he commands, to us is law and justice,  
 What he desires, we force from those denying :  
 Retract, proud prelate ! Yield thee to his will !  
 So may'st thou 'scape the lightning ; have a care  
 Lest it may strike thee wav'ring !

BECKET. Railing knight !  
 Learn this, I waver not. Pass out from here !  
 Come not again, till time hath taught thy lips  
 To rate less loudly ! (*Exit HUGH DE MORVILLE.*)

Leicester, thou hast done  
 Thy painful errand in all courtesy :  
 The love of God go with you.

LEICESTER. Oh, my lord,  
 May there not yet be peace ?

BECKET. On such terms, no !  
 (*Exeunt, except BECKET, GRIMM, and HERBERT.*)

BECKET. This war of words and jangle of contention  
 Fevers my weary body. See ! my hand,  
 Which oft has borne a lance the whole day long  
 As 'twere a twig, now trembles like a leaf.

If any need me, call !—I go to lay  
My pray'rs for strength before the throne of Heav'n.

(*Exit* BECKET.)

GRIMM. My lord is over-zealous, sleeps but little,  
And will not eat save of necessity,  
Wasting the flesh, the while his eager soul  
Wears it within.

HERBERT. And hides his rig'rous fare  
Beneath a show of luxury and pomp,  
Such as he deems is due before the world  
To match the grandeur of his priestly office.

GRIMM. A man may fast, though served on golden plate,  
And cloth of gold may hide the shirt of hair :  
What ostentation our dear lord doth show  
Serves but to mask his noble charity.

HERBERT. Aye ! For the feasts the world deems sumptuous,  
Set on unsparing, pass untasted all  
To feed the poor.

(*Enter* ROSAMOND CLIFFORD, *dressed as a nun*).

GRIMM. The hundred men-at-arms  
Whose armour shines about the palace doors,  
Are but an ensign of the primate's state ;  
The real man is he who goes alone  
Among the low-browed hovels of the needy,  
In search of sickness, sorrow, or despair.

HERBERT. He never rests : his ev'ry night is passed  
In pray'r to Heav'n, and all of ev'ry day  
In doing good to men.

ROSAMOND. Brothers, ye speak  
Of Thomas Becket ?

GRIMM. Aye ! of none else, sister,

ROSAMOND. May one have speech with him ?

HERBERT. Aye, readily !

Better thine habit recommends thy cause,  
Than had'st thou come bedizened as a queen.

ROSAMOND. A queen ! Can he surmise ? Nay ! who can  
What sin and sorrow have their hiding-place [know  
Beneath this mantle.

GRIMM. I will tell my lord.

ROSAMOND. Say only that a Sister Magdalen  
Of Godstowe prays for present audience.  
(*Exeunt GRIMM and HERBERT.*)

ROSAMOND. How will he meet me, being what I am ?  
He whom I knew, ah me ! how long ago,  
Ere yet the fire of sinful passion seared  
My budding heart ;—he who, most like a pearl,  
Amid the fervid foulness of the court  
Was stainless ever. How are we divided !  
I, that was daughter of a belted earl,  
Loving above, sank loving 'neath my rank,  
Loving was loved, and loving palled, and so  
Loving was cast away. (*Enter BECKET.*)

Can eyes so pure  
As his read aught but awful blackness here ?  
Can he guess all ; can he, so high in thought,  
Dream what a space divides poor Magdalen  
From haughty Rosamond Clifford ?

BECKET. Rosamond !

ROSAMOND. My lord ! (*Tries to kiss his hand. He raises her.*)

BECKET (*aside*). After these years !  
Methought they named

A Sister Magdalen.

ROSAMOND. 'Tis I, my lord !

BECKET (*after a pause*). What would'st thou, daughter ?

ROSAMOND. Father ! if repentance  
May bridge the awful gulf 'twixt thee and me ;  
If thou so high in the serener air  
May'st stoop to pity me who in the mire  
Tramp weary way ; if, though thou loathe the sin,  
Thou hast some mercy for the circumstance  
Which made the sinner, hear me !

BECKET (*aside*). Ah ! the voice !  
The gesture !

ROSAMOND. Father, turn thy face to me !  
Nay ! shrink not back ! I am not that I was :  
Ten years of pray'r and holy meditation,  
Of tears, of sighs, of all too late repentance——

BECKET. Never too late, my daughter.

ROSAMOND. Leave me now

Not Lady Rosamond, the royal mistress,  
But Magdalen, the sister of the poor.

BECKET (*aside*). How my heart stirs !

ROSAMOND. Oh, father, yet no word !

Can'st thou remember ?—turn thy mind beyond  
The fatal day when Henry won my love,  
Can'st thou remember—— ?

BECKET (*aside*). Ah ! could I forget ?

ROSAMOND. A little scholar, scarce of half thy years,  
Slow to be taught, but quick to be caressed,  
A little loving, laughing, coaxing girl,  
Who would not strive to read the crabbed lines  
Until thou saidst " I love thee ! "

BECKET (*aside*). Loved her, ah !

She knows not all.

ROSAMOND. And so the scholar grew

To be a woman, but she ne'er forgot  
Her loving teacher, pale with care and study :  
And then the clouds, with wind and drenching rain,  
Swept in between the two, and her they hurled  
Through royal state and royal misery,  
Through broken promises and blighted faith,  
To kneel a suppliant to him who loved her  
Before the tempest.

BECKET (*aside*). Loved her with the love

May kill, but dies not.

ROSAMOND. Father ! Father, hear !

I was deceived :—I am not all so vile,  
So foul a thing as thou believest me !  
When Henry came, and laid his lips on mine,  
He wooed me not to be his paramour,  
But on my finger set the mystic ring  
Which makes such slender margin 'twixt the loves,  
This deadly, and that holy. Shun me not !  
I sinned unknowing.

BECKET. Lied he then to thee ?

ROSAMOND. Nay ! But was false thereafter.

BECKET. And the queen ?



ROSAMOND. Wed to King Louis, had not then devised  
The quasi-widowhood that gave her Henry,  
Gave him the realms for which he married her.

BECKET. I knew not this.

ROSAMOND. Nor had'st thou known it now,  
Save that I dared not come before thy face  
And make my poor entreaty, till the truth  
Declared itself unveiled before thine eyes.

BECKET (*after a pause*). My daughter—

ROSAMOND. Father, judge me not in haste !  
Out of the boundless storehouse of thy pity  
Find me some comfort ! Fling me not away !  
But hear my pray'r ! Even a lep'rous wretch  
Thou would'st not pass unaiding ; stoop to me,  
Whose wings bedraggled in the dust o' the world  
May never soar to thee !

BECKET. My daughter !—I ?—  
I judge thee ? God forbid !—for sinner no'er  
Has needed mercy more.

ROSAMOND. What ? Thou ?

BECKET. Yes ! I !—

Or were I more than man ; having so long  
Lived amidst other men :—For ev'ry heart,  
Whate'er of outward show its seeming have,  
Fosters a plague-spot in it, feels it there,  
Fouling the very blood.

ROSAMOND. Is nothing good ?

BECKET. All things are good ! What if a man may bear  
Within his breast an enemy for ever,  
If he enslave that foe, and make him serve  
His better self for ever ? Daily fight  
Is growing strength : but embryo sin ungessed  
Begets a future falling : know thyself,  
Mistrust thyself ; and learn of this mistrust  
To pity others.

ROSAMOND. Father, there are men  
Aye ! women, hateful, sinful to the bone.

BECKET. Not one ! As none is good, not e'en the best,  
So in the deepest and the foulest slough

Is some firm ground if thou may'st touch it.

ROSAMOND. Father!

From all my misery of wasted years,  
From all my sorrow, all the happiness  
That might have been——

BECKET (*aside*.) Aye! Might have been;  
The cuckoo-cry of failure!

ROSAMOND. From despair,  
From long contention fruitless, from the rest  
Found at the last within the nunnery,  
Rises a cry of peace.

BECKET. There is no peace!  
A man may foster sloth and call it peace,  
Or drone in solitude and dream that peace;  
But ever in him is the warring heart,  
Calling him forth to nobler battle-fields!  
A man lives fighting, and must fighting die,  
Or shame his manhood.

ROSAMOND. From the king——

BECKET. The king?

ROSAMOND. E'en so! There came a messenger  
To me at Godstowe, and he prayed me go,  
As one attainted with no hope of gain,  
Desiring naught but peace for all the world,  
To pray thee, of thine olden amity,  
Of gratitude to him who raised thy fortune,  
To seek some middle ground in this contention  
Where ye may meet.

BECKET. Daughter, 'twixt right and wrong,  
Is nothing neutral: the king believes him right,  
I know I am not wrong: between us two  
Where is the compromise?

ROSAMOND. I reason not;  
I feel! 'Tis more than sad that two such men,  
He whom I loved, thee whom I honoured more,  
Upon some subtle point and fine distinction  
Should shock the realm with discord. Let me plead  
With thee for him, with him for thee, entreat  
Him by his love, thee by thy friendship past——

BECKET (*aside*). Reversed, the plea were stronger.

ROSAMOND. To abate

This hateful enmity !

BECKET (*aside*). As 'twere an angel

Suing for mercy for another's sin :

How fair, how good, she is !

ROSAMOND. Have you no answer ?

BECKET. It cannot be.

ROSAMOND. Oh father, in thy years

Has no strong sorrow beaten on thy life ;

Hast thou not known the torture of the night,

When day-light lags, and the small whisp'ring voices

Bear witness in the silence ;—hast not known

Uprising sad and sadder taking rest,

When all thy soul has longed for some release ;

Not happiness, that could not be, but only

Decrease of pain, or some new phase of pain ?

BECKET. For years I knew it.—(*Aside*) Knew it for the sake

Of her who speaks unknowing all I bore.—

For years I stood as 'twere upon a peak,

A precipice before, behind, around me ;

Perched on the present hour, I dared not glance

Back for I shuddered, forward for I shrank

A-tremble from the future.

ROSAMOND. Then by all

Thy soul hath suffered sinless, pity me

Who tottering stand like thee, but with the mass

Of my wrongdoing bound about my neck,

A burden and a danger !

BECKET. Press me not !

Lest yielding I may curse both thee and me.

ROSAMOND. What hope have I to win some small forgiveness

Save by the doing of some general good ?

It seemed to me that, as I came to-day,

An angel whispered, " Plain before thy feet

Lies the true way to offer reparation

For all the olden evil." Grant me this !

Oh ! Father, save my soul !

BECKET. Tempt me not, daughter !

(*Aside*). Oh! how her voice tugs at the strings o' my heart!

ROSAMOND. Oh! yield thee, father: Give the angry realm  
Peace from thy hands! Forbear! The king is hot:  
Who knows in this may lie what dread temptation  
To thee or him?

BECKET (*aside*). Ah, youth! Art thou not dead?

ROSAMOND. Around the peaceful circuit of the convent  
I hear the jarring words of wrathful men,  
And oaths and threats that tell of civil war,  
The English 'gainst the Norman, and the Church  
Against the king.

BECKET. That shall not be, I swear!  
I fight my fight with weapons not of earth,  
Whate'er the king may wield.

ROSAMOND. And words I hear  
Of excommunication, interdict,  
The deadly shafts of Heaven's armoury.

BECKET. Not for the people! 'Tis the topping hill  
That draws the lightning.

ROSAMOND. Peace! my lord, give peace!

BECKET. I may not. Hear me! Were this thing of me,  
Plain Thomas Becket, ere thy wish were framed  
'Twere granted:—but, I, being as I am,  
The Primate of all England, Head of the Church,  
May not betray her so.

ROSAMOND. A subtlety  
Of words I cannot follow.

BECKET (*aside*). Bruiséd reed,  
I will not break thee!

ROSAMOND. Thou, the minister  
Of Him who reigns by peace, wilt thou deny  
Thy message and thy master, sowing seed  
Of hot rebellion 'gainst the majesty  
He bids thee serve? Alas! How art thou changed  
From that good scholar!

BECKET I am but a steward,  
Holding the signet of my see in charge  
For some few years. Look thou a little forward!

Crushed if she fall ! I, guardian of the Cross,  
Stand by the Cross !

ROSAMOND.                               It may be so ; but I,  
Perplexed by all the misery of life,  
Its vain uprisings and its useless failures,  
Am weary of it, hope for naught but peace.

BECKET. My daughter, peace be with thee! If in aught  
I can befriend thee, bid me serve thee ever.

ROSAMOND. I pray thee serve me only in this thing!

BECKET. I cannot do it.

ROSAMOND.                      Cannot! Then I go  
Back to my cell in sadness, unabsolved :  
The will is not the deed !

BECKET.                 It strains my heart  
    To grieve thee thus.

ROSAMOND.                    Enough ! I must to Henry !  
But yet one word of warning : look to thee !  
See thou adventure not too far with him,  
Lest he undo thee !

BECKET. Naught can e'er undo  
Him who fears nothing. Go, my daughter, go!  
My blessing with thee!

ROSAMOND.                      Father! Magdalen  
Prays thee forgive whate'er from Rosamond  
Grieved or may grieve thee.

BECKET. Daughter, go in peace!  
(*Exit ROSAMOND.*)

BECKET. I loved her : how I loved her ! I was then  
Just at the moment when the years are ripe,  
When all a man is, ever can be, gives  
The colour to his life : when love no more  
Is daily pastime, but a life-long need !  
Ah me ! She knew it not : she ne'er will know.—

Could I, a careworn, pale and timid scholar,  
Dare to address the daughter of the Clifford?  
And so——and so——

Enough! Am I a boy?

All love is gone for ever, past recalling,  
Even in dreams, and dreams are naught to me:  
To work is mine, to do, to dare, to suffer!  
All that is past is dead, save in so far  
As tends our future life to make or mar.

END OF SCENE I.—ACT II.

## ACT II.

SCENE II.—*The Ante-chamber of the Council-hall, Northampton.*

(RANULPH DE BROC, RICHARD LE BRETON, and WILLIAM TRACY  
speaking. Enter PRINCE WILLIAM and REGINALD FITZURSE.)

WILLIAM. Now welcome, gentlemen! A goodly hunt  
Is ours to-day. Is Becket harboured yet?

RANULPH. My lord, he tarries; pray he 'scape us not  
By priestly prudence.

LE BRETON. Never fear! No boar  
Charged ever headlong on the circling nets,  
As shall boar Thomas.

WILLIAM. Ware his tushes, sir!

DE TRACY. Nay! Ere he leave the castle——

RANULPH. If he leave it;  
Since, as I hear, the king has order giv'n,  
That on his entrance ev'ry gate be shut  
And guarded.

WILLIAM. Ah! This is news indeed!  
My lords, I bid you all unto my bridal.

FITZURSE. When shall it be, my lord?

WILLIAM. A month behind  
This rascal's ending. Roger of York will be

Less captious than the other.

LE BRETON. And, my lord,

A boar's head were a sav'ry wedding dish.

RANULPH. Sell not the bristles ere the beast be dead.

WILLIAM. How can he 'scape? Doth any wish him well?

ALL. Not one!

FITZURSE. The king himself is so bewrought

With anger, that he will not write to him,

Since at the heading he must needs set "Greeting."

TRACY. What is the scheme, my lord, to take the man?

WILLIAM. First, for his double-dealing with the king

At Clarendon, there stands a charge of treason.

TRACY. How will he answer that?

WILLIAM. He cannot? Next

Are twenty other counts, of peculation,

Of money from the king at usury

Borrowed, and ne'er repaid. We have him fast.

RANULPH. How if he pay?

WILLIAM. He cannot: all his lands

His manors, rents, his ev'ry benefice,

At once escheated for the former crime,

He is a beggar now, a debtor then,

With nothing but his body for his bond.

FITZURSE. Who shall adjudge this? Not the king himself?

'Tis he that sues.

WILLIAM. The barons and the bishops

Of England.

TRACY. Will they?

WILLIAM. Aye! Perforce they must.

RANULPH. Some love, some hate, all go in fear of him.

WILLIAM. But all condemn him, for the king betimes

Advises each, that death or mutilation

Rewards an adverse verdict.

RANULPH. Say you so?

A royal road to justice! Kingly threats

Bear weighty reason.

FITZURSE. If he fly, my lord?

WILLIAM. Then is he outlaw, prey to ev'ry man

With wit to snare him, strength to hold him fast.

Joy with me, gentlemen, for not one here  
 But some time suffered something at his hands :  
 I in my love (*to LE BRETON*) thou in thy life he threatened ;  
 Fitzurse to me, Tracy to thee, de Broc,  
 As good friends and good fellows, lend their aid,  
 (*To RANULPH*) Is thine hate bitter ?

RANULPH. To the death, my lord.

WILLIAM. And the occasion of it ?

RANULPH. Such an insult

As no man dares to whisper.

WILLIAM. How ? (*Trumpets heard.*)

RANULPH. My Lord,

Here comes the king.

(*Enter KING and train.*)

KING. I greet you, gentlemen.

(*Exit procession into the council-chamber.*)

END OF SCENE II.—ACT II.

## ACT II.

SCENE III.—*The Council-chamber at Northampton.*

(All standing. The King walking up and down the hall as if in  
 thought. The Barons speaking together.)

KING. As well to make an end !—Ye know, my lords,  
 How in these later days, of olden kindness  
 Forgetful, careless, stubborn Becket stands  
 A rebel 'gainst my ruling, aye ! a traitor :  
 So much at least he who can read the times,  
 E'en though he blink and boggle, needs must see.  
 So much I knew of old, but now I learn,



And shall to you discover, such a trespass,  
 A fault so beggarly, a crime so mean,  
 As bids me blush that e'er I called him friend,  
 Or stooped to raise him from his native mire.  
 Speak on, my lord of York.

YORK. My lord the king,  
 Finding discrepancy in such loose statements  
 As Becket, late the chancellor of England,  
 Displayed before him, bade me secretly  
 Look to the matter. Probing here and there,  
 As 'twere amid corruption, I have found  
 Such evil doings, so unscrupulous,  
 As, were the sum of the total added up,  
 Declares the archbishop debtor to my lord  
 In thirty thousand marks.

KING. A monstrous sum,  
 Wrung from the tithes of ev'ry benefice  
 His hands could grasp, from ev'ry canon's stall,  
 And drawn, aye filched, from the particular store  
 O' the royal treasure.—Hear ye then and judge!

WINCHESTER. My lord! The primate——

KING. Comes not here. The wolf  
 Is wary of the hunter, and the thief  
 Lists not to face the justice.—Read, my lord,  
 The foremost charge.

YORK. Stands on the list, my lord,  
 Item, to serve the war against Toulouse,  
 Five hundred marks lent by my lord the king  
 To Thomas Becket: Item, to equip  
 The embassy to France, five hundred marks,  
 On royal surety borrowed from a Jew,  
 One Solomon.

KING. And ne'er repaid, my lords!  
 (*Shouts heard.*) What means this uproar?  
 (*Enter an Usher.*)

USHER. At the castle gate  
 The lord archbishop claimed his privilege  
 Of entrance, forced the guard, and from the court  
 Into the presence passes.

KING. Is he here?—

I cannot see the man!—I loved him once,  
And of my love is born the stronger hate:  
Pass we, my lords, into an inner room,  
And there devise this matter. Hold the door,  
And let none pass! (*Exeunt KING and court.*)

[*A curtain falls over the door—a guard in front.*]  
(*Enter BECKET, bearing his cross, followed by bishops, priests etc. He advances to the door—the guard lower their pikes.*)

BECKET. Give place!

OFFICER. Not so, my lord!

Save by the king's command.

BECKET. Obedience

In us does equal honour.

(*He sits thinking in the centre of the hall.*)

WINCHESTER (*to LONDON*). Wilt permit

My lord the primate thus to bear his cross?

LONDON. Indeed, good man, he ever was a fool:

Fool to the end.

WINCHESTER (*to BECKET*). My lord, may my poor aid  
Relieve thee of the cross?

BECKET. Nay! dear my son!

To ev'ry knight his banner.

LONDON. Look thou now,  
My lord archbishop, whither tends thy conduct,  
To peace or war? Against thy banner-cross  
The king will bare the sword.

BECKET. And so in keeping:  
The sword of war the symbol, this of peace,  
And peace I will not loose.

(*Loud talking heard from the council.*)

LONDON. My lord, the Church  
Seeks guidance at thy hands: Wilt thou, for this  
So trifling question, suffer hot discussion  
To part her from the throne?

BECKET. What throne?—I bow  
To one throne only, that of Heaven, my son.  
We are the kings of the earth; shall we abase  
Our majesty to men?

LONDON.

Hast thou no fear  
To match thy single individual judgment  
'Gainst that of ev'ry bishop?—Is thy neck  
So stiff it cannot bow to save thine head?  
Look thou, my lord, I will not share thy sin,  
Who with a two-edged sword would'st drive the Church  
Into the lion's maw!

SALISBURY. Nor I!

CHICHESTER. Nor I!

My lord, it is the noble privilege  
Of thine high office, so to lead the Church  
That all her ways be peace: I dare to say  
That this contempt and all too huge presumption  
Tend but to schism, as parting good from good,  
Admitting evil.

BECKET. Judas! Get thee gone!  
Out of thy seeming candour, lying tongue,  
Thou hast betrayed.

WINCHESTER.                      My lord, I have been young,  
And now am old, but never knew I one  
Who trusted Heav'n, by trusted Heaven forsaken :  
Be strong to do the right, whate'er betide !  
I, who anointed thee, will stand by thee,  
Stand, aye ! and fall if need be.

BECKET. Dear my lord,  
To the exceeding honour of thy years  
Hast thou an added honour : For the Church,  
Whose champions we——

To lay upon my loins a heavy burden,  
 To beat upon my face with lashing rain,  
 To loose my foes upon me ; but the sum  
 Of all this misery weighs little 'gainst  
 The sorrow of your failing :—You, the sons  
 Of our dear Mother, have deserted me ;  
 And you, who should have fought beside me, sting,  
 As 'twere a mote in the eye,—a goad in the side.

LONDON (*aside*). "A goad to do thee good !—Methinks, my  
 A swimming boat on stormy blust'rous seas, [lords,  
 Than such a sinking and disastrous ship,  
 Has more abiding comfort.

BECKET. Aye ! for a rat !  
 I prayed you, as my brethren, side with me ;  
 But now, by virtue of my holy office,  
 I, Thomas Becket, primate of all England,  
 Enjoin you all, in peril of your orders,  
 Presume not one of you to judge my cause,  
 Nor dare be present when the cause is judged :  
 For I, deserted, lone, a prisoner,  
 Appeal from Henry to the Holy See !

LONDON. The Holy See !

WINCHESTER. My father, is this wise ?

BECKET. I care not, knowing well it must be right.

And furthermore, if any dare to lay  
 A sacrilegious hand upon my person,  
 I do command, by virtue of my office,  
 Ye loose upon them ev'ry ban of Church ;  
 Curse them with book and candle ! Give their souls  
 Unto damnation ! Spare none ! Pity none !

LONDON. A fool as ever !

WINCHESTER. Dear my lord, I pray——

BECKET. See that ye waver not !—For be assured  
 Though earth oppress me, aye ! though hell shall gape  
 And void her spawn, I will not yield a jot !  
 Though this frail body 'neath a hundred arms,  
 Confess its weakness writhing in the dust,  
 My spirit shall unvanquished hold its guard  
 Against oppression.—Nor will I, am dubbed

The knight of Heaven, turn my back in flight,  
Nor, by the merey of God, desert the flock  
Committed to my care.

CHICHESTER. My lord, such words  
Are not attuned to a royal ear,  
Nor like to quiet strife.

BECKET. My lord, such words  
Are such as should be spoken, let the king  
Think as he may. *(Enter an Usher.)*

USHER. My lords, the king desires  
The bishops' presence.

*(To BECKET.)* Nay! Not thine, my lord.

WINCHESTER. May Heav'n thou servest nobly, keep thee safely!

BECKET. I have no doubt. *(Exeunt Bishops.)*

*(A pause—violent speaking in the inner room.)*

HERBERT. Hast thou the Host, my lord?

BECKET. Here, next my heart.

GRIMM. As well all things were ready,  
Should they lay hands upon thee, to declare  
The greater excommunication.

HERBERT. Nay!  
Far be it from my lord!—Not so the martyr,  
Our best example, taught us:—let him pray  
For all, forgive all, and possess his mind  
In patience, e'en if he shall suffer wrong;  
So shall his soul have rest, his mem'ry blessing.

BECKET. For you go I in fear:—Fear not yourselves!  
My crown is yours.

GRIMM. Let us not either fear!  
This is a noble standard, bear it up  
Against the sons of earth, the pow'rs of air  
And overthrow them!

HERBERT. Father, if I may——

USHER. Speak not unto my lord!

GRIMM. What?

USHER. Silence, sir!

*(GRIMM points to the cross—BECKET smiles and nods—They all kneel. Enter the Empress, the Queen, and Ladies.)*

QUEEN. Madam, sec here my lord the proud archbishop

Bent to his knees.

EMPRESS. 'Tis best he should be so.

BECKET (*rising—to the Queen.*) Madam, I kneel, but to no earthly master :

And better 'twere that thy remaining years  
Should sue for pardon for thy godless past.

QUEEN. Serpent, thou hast a tongue, but guard it well !

EMPRESS. Lest others guard it for thee.

BECKET. Empress Maud !

Thou who hast lived with sorrow, slept with it,  
Waked with it, found it's daily taste and taint  
In e'en thy platter and thy cup ; can'st thou  
Deride the fallen, vex the bruised heart ?  
Is there no chord within thy woman's breast  
May answer to my cry of weariness,  
As matching thine of old ?

EMPRESS. Is this a churl,  
Who speaks such words ?

QUEEN. Aye, mother ! Such a churl,  
That, were he perched again upon his throne,  
He would not stoop to favour thee, to yield  
Aught thou desirest.

EMPRESS. Why didst thou, my lord,  
Defeat my urgent purpose, straining words  
Of Holy Writ to thine interpretation,  
And William's loss ?

BECKET. Madam, it is not I  
Who thwart thee : Holy Church, in her desire  
To check unnatural longing, has declared  
Such union sinful.

QUEEN. Madam ! I !—Not I !—  
When ev'ry silly fool in all thy see  
Well knows that, had'st thou wagged thy smallest finger,  
The Church were silent.

BECKET. Ev'ry silly fool—  
Well said,—none other !—Pass thou by, the queen,  
The—— Nay ! I will not speak the word : but go !  
Pass to thine own !

QUEEN. Pass I where'er I will,

Thou goest never.

EMPRESS.                   Hush! Hush! My daughter!  
Becket, I have some skill to move the king,  
Some right to sway him, being as I am  
Her by whose motherhood he wears the crown;  
And by the right of age, and by my sorrows  
Of which he reaps the fruit, I have some voice  
In e'en his councils.

BECKET.                   Madam, all must know,  
The king reveres thee.

EMPRESS.                   Granted it be so,  
I will adventure all my pow'r to plead  
For thee to Henry;—I will place this matter  
In such new light before his eyes, that he,  
Blind to thy faults, shall nothing clearer see  
Than thy forgotten love.

BECKET.                   Ah, madam, so  
Shalt thou obtain the richest crown of age,  
A blessed ending.

EMPRESS.                   Only this I ask;  
Wilt thou, if I restore thee to thy place  
In the heart, in the realm, of the king, give me thine aid  
To work this marriage for my son?

BECKET.                   I cannot.

EMPRESS.   Thou can'st not?—Shall I waste my toil and pain  
To prop a puppet "cannot"?—Out on thee!  
Go to thy dungeon!

BECKET.                   Madam, by my office  
I am constrained to a narrow path;  
That which another man may tripping take  
Is closed to me.

EMPRESS.                   What have I bid thee do;  
To climb the Alps, to leap the endless sea?

BECKET.   Aye! More!—Thou'st bid that I should stain my  
By such accession to thy doubtful purpose,                   [rank  
That if a man should say, "For fear of death  
Thou gav'st thine honour, setting life before  
Thy conscience!"—I could not belie that man.

EMPRESS.   Enough! Perchance ere many days are past

Thou wilt be wiser.

BECKET. Go in peace, my daughter.

QUEEN. Better keep peace with thee, thou'lt need it yet !  
(*Exeunt Empress, Queen, and Ladies.*)

BECKET. I need it now : How many a silly word  
Has poison in it ?—Peace !—It is the grave.

(*Enter LEICESTER, CORNWALL, PRINCE WILLIAM, and Lords.*)

LEICESTER. My lord archbishop, from my lord the king  
We come to thee ; see thou with reverence  
Receive his words.

BECKET. My lords and gentlemen.  
By oath and fealty I hold me bound  
Unto my lord the king, as his liege man,  
In honour and fidelity to serve him ;  
Save in such matters as are due to Heav'n,  
The Church's dignity and mine own office.

LEICESTER. My lord the king with indignation hears  
That thou hast, touching statutes of the realm,  
Unto the Pope appealed.

BECKET. Not so ; the question  
Is touching discipline.

LEICESTER. The arguments  
Regarding thine accounts, which to the king  
Were pleaded, are by him rejected, stand  
Convict of failure.

BECKET (*aside.*) Faulty by their force.

LEICESTER. We, that are earls and barons of the realm,  
Do therefore now demand that thou, archbishop,  
Deliver presently to us the roll  
Of thine expense as royal chancellor ;  
And further,—hear me out !—that thou shalt swear,  
By Canterbury's cross, obedience  
To all the court decide.

BECKET. My lords and brethren all,  
Many commissions bore I from the king ;  
In all was faithful, in his service spared  
Not e'en my private revenue ; again,  
Being elect Archbishop, from the king  
Received indemnity for all the past :



This is reputed fact to most of you,  
 And is the anchor of my cause.—The charge  
 Anent the appeal is easier yet to answer;  
 For which of you, my lords, who is a soldier,  
 Would give consent that matters military  
 Be judged in the ranks?—I, am anointed head  
 Of England's Church, admit no other chief  
 Than he is Sovereign Pontiff of the world:  
 I did appeal, I do appeal, to him,  
 And place beneath omnipotent protection  
 My Church and mine own person.

LEICESTER. This shall straight  
 Unto the king. (*Exeunt LEICESTER and CORNWALL.*)

WILLIAM. The Conqueror had known  
 A spell to tame such clerics.

FITZURSE. Aye, indeed!  
 Such vermin hawks as dared to fly too high  
 He mewed up closely.

RANULPH. Or he clipped their wings.

WILLIAM. He of Bayeux had narrow bishopric  
 In London's Tower.

LE BRETON. Come we nearer home:  
 Stigand of Canterbury fourteen years  
 Lay in a dungeon.

RANULPH. Geoffrey, Henry's father,  
 Did better yet.

BECKET. Out! Out! Ye coward knights!  
 Is this the manhood of your chivalry,  
 To vex the helpless, smite unarmed heads?  
 We, who are soldiers in our hearts, will teach  
 You, that be warriors only by your garb,  
 To do, to dare, to die. (*They threaten him.*)

WILLIAM. Hold fast, my lords!  
 A dying tongue hath licence.  
 (*Exeunt WILLIAM and lords. The Archbishop of York and  
 the Bishops enter from the council-chamber.*)

YORK. Come my sons!  
 Let us away, lest we be witnesses  
 Of all his lordship suffers. (*Exit.*)

SALISBURY (*throwing himself at BECKET's feet.*) Father! Father!  
 Pity thyself! Have pity too on us!  
 Wilt thou destroy us also, by the hate  
 Which bursts on thee?—The king attaints of treason  
 All who may favour thee.

BECKET. Hence, Satan, hence!  
 Thou sav'rest not the things which be of God.

SALISBURY (*to LONDON.*) Didst hear the king?

LONDON. Aye! No uncertain words.

SALISBURY. Of mutilation spake he.

LONDON. And of death.

SALISBURY. An'twere a righteous cause, I were not careful  
 To dare my life, but this——

LONDON. In this, I doubt.

SALISBURY. So great presumption!

LONDON. And too little caution!

SALISBURY. Better we go, my brother.

LONDON. Till the storm

Be spent a little.

(*Exeunt.*)

CHICHESTER. Saving thy grace, my lord,  
 We have of thee some subject of complaint;  
 Thy sudden mandate fixes us betwixt  
 The royal hammer and the Church's anvil,  
 Condemned and helpless.—In our ignorance  
 Of priestly craft, we had believed this case  
 At Clarendon decided, for we there,  
 Thou first, the acts and customs of the king  
 Have signed and sealed.

BECKET. My lord, thou goest too far:  
 I set no seal.

CHICHESTER. Nay! But assented all;  
 And when the king bade swear, required him know  
 A bishop's word sufficient;—he, content,  
 Pressed us no farther on the point; but now  
 Thou, who didst lead our promise, dost forbid  
 The service promised:—Is this good, my lord?  
 From this oppression of authority  
 And misdirection, fearing future ill,  
 We, who obey protesting, do appeal

Unto the Church's head.

BECKET. And by God's help  
 I'll answer that appeal ; know this, my lord,  
 The Pope, to whom thou callest, has condemned  
 All, ev'ry tittle of the royal acts,  
 Annuls each word !—What he receives, receive ;  
 As he rejects, reject !—It is our Faith.  
 We fell at Clarendon ; none more than I  
 Grieves for the failing, but the flesh is weak :  
 Bewail our fault with me, and make of it  
 With me a fresh departure :—He who holds  
 The keys of Heav'n and Hell declares our oath  
 Unlawful ; so it is not, never was,  
 And, as I live, ne'er shall be !

(*Enter LEICESTER, CORNWALL, PRINCE WILLIAM, and Lords.*)

Go my brothers !  
 E'en those of you who love me not, I pray,  
 Give me your prayers. (*Exeunt Bishops.*)

(*BECKET rises.*)

GRIMM. Sit ! Sit, my lord, 'twere well  
 That these should feel how they condemn their father,  
 And he who bears the cross saluteth none.

(*BECKET sits.*)

LEICESTER. The king commands thou render up account  
 Of all expenditure.

BECKET. It cannot be.

LEICESTER. Then hear, my lord, the judgment of the Court.

BECKET. The judgment ! Nay, my son the earl !—Hear me !  
 Thou know'st of old how I have loved the king,  
 How faithfully I served him :—For this love  
 And for such service, he appointed me  
 To be archbishop. Loving well the king,  
 More than my God, I yielded, and alas !  
 For this my weakness now am sore chastised,  
 Being deserted both by God and king.  
 Anent this present charge ; at my enthroning  
 Question was asked and open answer giv'n,  
 Before, my lord, Prince Henry : “ Comes this man  
 Free to the Church ? ”—“ Free from all worldly ties ! ”

I am not therefore bound, nor will I plead  
Respecting prior matters.

LEICESTER.                                        That the king  
Had from my lord of London stands not thus,  
Nay! in essentials differs :—But, my lord,  
Can'st thou refuse the judgment of the king,  
Being his subject, holding at his hands  
Estates and rents in fief and barony.

BECKET. Nothing I hold in fief or barony !  
 Whatever kings have given to the Church,  
 That have they granted as free alms ; and more  
 The king himself hath by his solemn act  
 Declared the same.—I therefore, by my office,  
 And by the high authority is mine,  
 By ordinance of God, and by the law  
 Of Christendom, do now forbid thee, earl,  
 To judge me, thine archbishop.

LEICESTER. Dear my lord,  
I would not in this matter order aught  
To my soul's detriment. I hold my peace.  
(To CORNWALL.) Therefore do thou, my lord, what may  
And speak the king's commands. [remain.]

CORNWALL. I venture not,  
Save as is ordered.

LEICESTER.                    Then, my lord, I pray,  
That you await the answer.

BECKET. Am I then  
A prisoner here?

LEICESTER.           No! By Saint Lazarus, No!  
(*The Lords are about to go off.*)

BECKET. Yet listen, son and earl !—By insomuch  
As is the living soul within thy body  
More worthy than the carcase, by so much  
Are you, a Christian, bound to God and me,  
To hear and follow, rather than the king :  
Nor earthly law nor common reason suffers  
That children judge their father : Wherefore then  
I clean refuse the judgment of the king,  
Of you, or any other, Under God.

The Pope alone shall judge! Before you all  
 I here appeal to him, and give the Church,  
 Myself, my order and my dignity  
 To God's protection and to his; and those  
 My fellow-bishops, who deny me here,  
 I summon to the presence of the Pope!  
 And now, in guard beneath the awful shield  
 Of the Catholic Church and of the Holy See,  
 I will go hence. (*Turns to go; the Earls pass out.*)

WILLIAM. Perjured traitor!

FITZURSE. See!

The traitor runs away!

WILLIAM. Sneaks as a rat

Into his safety hole!

LE BRETON. Farewell, my lord!

Say, shall I hold thy horse?

WILLIAM. Out! Out! Traitor!

BECKET. William! Were I a knight, my sword alone  
 Should answer such a lie.

ALL. Out! Traitor! Out!

(*They hoot him and throw sticks and straws at him, driving him out of the hall. When he has gone, exit an usher to the King.—Enter the King.*)

KING. Gone?—Is he gone?

WILLIAM. His tail between his legs;  
 A well-whipped cur!

KING. Pray Heav'n he come not back,  
 To give thy word the lie!

LE BRETON (*looking from the window.*) Ah! As I live  
 They find the keys o' the gate,—he passes out!  
 (*Loud cheers heard.*)

KING. What cries are these?

LEICESTER (*looking out.*) The English poor, my lord:  
 They cluster round him, scramble for his hand,  
 Almost would tear the very cross away  
 To plant their kisses; scarce can Becket guide  
 His pacing palfrey, so they press around,  
 About him; kiss his very stirrup, cling  
 E'en to his mantle: How they love him!

KING.

Aye!

He is a man to love!--Were he my friend,  
All that I do or dare should have good end!

END OF ACT II.

## ACT III.

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SCENE I. (A. D. 1164).—*The country near St. Omer.*

(A crowd of BECKET's dependents, men, women and children, straggles in).

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OSBERT. Courage, my father,

GILBERT. Nay! I can no more!

My curse upon the king, that he has driv'n

My English bones to lie in Norman ground!

EDITH. Hush! Hush, my father!

STEPHEN. Nay! Shall he keep silence,  
When we, were free men in a Christian land,  
Are for no fault of ours thus dispossessed,  
And flung as strangers on a foreign shore?  
May Heav'n who sees us, blight King Henry's name,  
And may his children curse him, since he wills  
Our children starve!

MARY. 'Tis but a little month  
Since we were happy.

OSBERT. Aye! And knew it not  
E'en for the ease of it.

GILBERT. Aye! a month ago  
My life of toil had rest in honoured age,  
But now,—alas!

STEPHEN. We, that were English yeomen,  
The sons, by right the owners, of the land,  
Are by this Norman tyrant sent adrift,  
A vagrant rabble. (Enter PENDA.)

Hast thou English, sir ?

PENDA. English ?—I hardly know :—So many years  
My tongue hath tied itself into such knots,  
Fretting itself to ape the Norman roll :  
But I am English-born :—And who are ye ?

STEPHEN. We be all English :—Some of us are thralls,  
Some yeomen, others citizens, but all  
Footsore and penniless.

PENDA. What do ye here ?

STEPHEN. Torn from our English homes by Norman hands,  
We, crowded in a narrow boat, were borne  
Across tempestuous seas, and tumbled out  
Upon this shore as beggars.

PENDA. How my heart  
Warms to the English burr !

GILBERT. Aye ! gentle sir !  
I am an old man, sir, and very feeble ;  
I scarce can totter on——

STEPHEN. Look well around !  
What seest thou ?

PENDA (*aside*). A very motley crowd.

STEPHEN. All these hath Henry cast from out his realm.

PENDA. Was it the dappled deer hath tempted thee,  
Too fat for flight ?—Was thy unlucky bow  
A thought too handy ; so the arrow flew  
At royal venison ?

STEPHEN. Nay ! 'Twas none of that :  
We are condemned for trespass not of ours !  
Say ! Hast thou heard the hatred of the king  
To Thomas Becket ?

PENDA. Aye !

STEPHEN. Since he has fled  
Beyond the royal arm, the king, unable  
To catch the lion, hunts the lion's fleas.

PENDA. And ye are——

STEPHEN. Some attached to the archbishop,  
And fathers, mothers, brethren, of his clerks,  
And, being so, are judged to be too foul  
To sully English ground.



PENDA. Had I been told  
A swineherd did such thing, I dared to say—  
"Thou lily-livered churl."—But in the king  
I doubt 'tis statecraft.

STEPHEN. Call it what thou wilt.  
I call it murder!—All the company  
Hath not a groat amongst them. Some of us  
Are delicately nurtured, never knew  
How keen the winter wind at midnight blows,  
Nor felt the desp'rate fellowship betwixt  
An empty purse and hunger.

PENDA. I myself  
Of my poor store may aid you.—Here is bread!  
Black as it is the hungry will not loathe it:  
Would I had more! There! There! My little ones:  
Hush! Hush! Content ye! Whither go ye, sir?

STEPHEN. Where goes the thistledown, o'er hill and valley,  
As lists the wind.

PENDA. I pray you tarry here  
Until my lord returns.

STEPHEN. My lord! Who's he?

PENDA. My lord archbishop.

STEPHEN. Becket?

PENDA. Aye!

STEPHEN. Stand up!  
All, all of you! Shout loud! Our lord is here!  
God bless him!

ALL. God bless him!

GILBERT. Sirs, he came,  
But two short months ago, to see me, sirs,  
Aye! to see *me*.

ALURED. And when the sickness was,  
And my poor wife—— the very leeches feared  
To come anigh the house; but he, the primate,  
First of the land, he came, and sat awhile:  
And she died blessing him.

STEPHEN. He shall be blessed!  
None is too poor for him, and none too vile:  
Sin is disease to him, and may be cured;

Sickness, how dread-soe'r it be, begets  
 Not fear but pity : Sorrow's not more sad  
 Than Becket is for sorrow : ev'ry man  
 Forlorn, despairing, claims him as his friend  
 By right of misery : The poor are brothers,  
 The wretched sons to him : God bless the man !

PENDA. E'en as thou sayest !—Methinks !—My eyes are dim :  
 Seest thou something there ?

STEPHEN. Aye ! in the distance.

PENDA. Perchance it is my lord.

STEPHEN. Two mules I see.

GILBERT. Lift me, my son.

STEPHEN. Some little company

As weary, straggling.

BECKET (*without.*) Robert, take thou the horses !

We follow thee afoot.

PENDA. See ! See ! He's here !

(*Enter BECKET, DE LUCI, DE MORVILLE, HERBERT and GRIMM.*)

ALL. God save thee !

GILBERT. Lead me quickly to my lord !

(*They crowd round him, kissing his hands and dress.*)

BECKET. God bless you all, good people ! Give me space !

Or loving hands are like to make me fall :

My blessing on you !—How ! Art thou here, Stephen ?

Old Gilbert too, and Edith ?—Little Ralph,

Art early wandering !—Read me now this riddle ;

Why you good folks, I deemed at Canterbury,

Cluster about me here.

STEPHEN. My lord,—the king——

BECKET. The king ?—Is this his royal embassy,

The poor and needy, to the exiled Church ?

STEPHEN. He, by an order published to the sheriffs,

Arrested all who served thee ; having ta'en

Their cattle, lands and goods, has thrown them out

Across the sea.

BECKET. My children ! My poor children !

So, for the father's fault, the son is cursed.

Be comforted, ye shall not want ! The hand

That wrought the evil shall amend the evil :

I, that am cause that ye go now in pain,  
 Will share my all with you ! With me ye weep,  
 With me ye shall rejoice !—Hath any need ;  
 I am his purse : Is any sick or sad ;  
 I am his healing and his happiness :  
 I am not mine, I am all yours for ever ;  
 Son, brother, father, to each one of you  
 To my life's ending !

Herbert, be their guide

Unto the abbey ; pray his Reverence

To lodge them as myself.—Farewell, my friends.

ALL. Long live the lord archbishop, and God bless him !

(*They crowd about him. Exeunt except BECKET, DE LUCI,  
 and DE MORVILLE.*)

BECKET. Is this thing well, de Luci ? Art thou proud  
 That he that is thy king should stoop to wound  
 So weak a thing as that ? The peregrine  
 Turns flycatcher.

DE LUCI. My lord, I knew it not :  
 I am but late from Flanders.

BECKET. Knew it not !  
 Dost thou know this ; in mine own diocese,  
 In mine own church, the king forbids to pray  
 For wicked Thomas Becket ? As if law,  
 King's law, should still the universal prayer  
 Unto the King of Kings :—It is as though  
 A man should spread his cloak unto the wind,  
 To stop the wind.

DE LUCI. My lord, thou know'st as I,  
 Impetuous Henry, beat upon by passion,  
 Can rule no more the pattern of his rage  
 Than can the sea its surges, when the gale  
 Rips all the smooth of it, the green of it,  
 To ashen billows.

BECKET. He, is great, my lord,  
 Stands high above the passion of the hour,  
 As doth a sea-light o'er tempestuous waves,  
 And sheds a bright impartial flame around  
 O'er toil and terror.

DE LUCI.                               Who is great, my lord,  
Save in his striving?

DE MORVILLE.                   Come we to the point!  
The king commands that thou at once return  
To England and thy duty.

BECKET.                               Gently, sir!  
I take no orders; least of all from thee,  
My vassal: speak, de Luci!

DE LUCI.                               Dear my lord,  
Thou'st learned the king?

BECKET.                               Aye! Every nerve and bone  
Into the very centre of his being.

DE LUCI. And gauging him can'st feel how bitterly  
He now repents the rancour of his wrath,  
Which like the fiery flaming sword of old  
Drove thee from Paradise.

BECKET.                               From Paradise?  
The word's too strong!—No Eden was't to me,  
Who never slept but in the fear of death,  
Who never rising thought to sleep again  
Save in the tomb, whose every dish and cup  
Was dashed with possible poison: all my life  
Was due to keep my life, no leisure left  
For others' saving.

DE LUCI.                               This, my lord, is past!  
Each tempest hath its ending: like a sun  
The king doth rise above the mist of anger  
Into meridian height of warmest love:  
Forgiveness——

BECKET.                               Mine or his?

DE LUCI.                               Of both, my lord,  
Each to the other.

BECKET.                               Nay! It is too soon!  
I like not instant changes.—Ask the sailor  
What means the sudden spot of light on high,  
(He calls it bull's eye,) when amidst the clouds,  
Are toppling o'er with wind, for one brief moment  
The glory of the sun in golden shafts  
Breaks on the broken water? He shall say;

"Look to thy tackle! All that yet hath been  
 "Is but a babe to him that followeth."

DE MORVILLE. King Henry is an honest man, my lord ;  
 Holding his own, he neither gives nor takes  
 Save in requital : be thou true to him,  
 He's true to thee ; deceive him, he's no fool  
 To kiss deception. Put away from thee  
 Thy malice, here's his hand.

BECKET. A heavy hand,  
 As those poor creatures know.

DE MORVILLE. He has a sword  
 Is heavier far.

BECKET. Dost dare to threaten me ?  
 Beware the thong, babbler !

DE LUCI. I pray thee, patience !  
 De Morville, silence ! Pardon him, my lord,  
 His so exceeding zeal. He loves the king  
 As loves a hound his master, worships him  
 As 'twere a God, can find no fault in him ;  
 Is faithful, very faithful, to the hand  
 That feeds him, barks—aye ! bites to please the king  
 At any, ev'ry man.

BECKET (*aside*). 'Tis such as he  
 That make kings possible : the fawning note  
 Of the pale parasite is at the sound,  
 The very breath of battle silenced ; these  
 Loving, they know not why, the man is called  
 Their king, draw swords and up, fight, slay, are slain,  
 To do another honour : loyalty  
 Is over all unselfish, reasons not,  
 Yet hath some reason. In so much as man  
 Himself is feeble, needs he visible strength,  
 A concrete might, to which he girds himself,  
 Staying and stayed.

Give me thy hand, de Morville.

DE MORVILLE. Never again ! I for my poor estate  
 Was thy liege man ; I served thee well in all,  
 Save such as touched the honour of the king.  
 Take back thine hand ! To me it is accursed !

Archbishop! I renounce my fealty,  
 Abjure my plighted word, withdraw my homage!  
 And now, absolved from my disloyal oath,  
 For England and for England's noble king  
 Defy thee, traitor, even to the death!

(*Exit DE MORVILLE.*)

BECKET. 'Tis pity! Go, de Morville! Fare thee well!  
 A noble man, but fashioned to the times,  
 And of the times a soldier; rough in speech,  
 In manners rude, with something in his heart  
 Rings true as gold. He has no doubts, no fears;  
 His watchword and his touchstone are "the king:"  
 Oh! Faith sublime, which thus can judge the world  
 By such a simple test.

DE LUCI. My lord, I go:  
 May I not bear some message to the king  
 Of reconciliation, amity,  
 Now or in future? Must a frenzy part  
 Two such as ye?

BECKET. Aye! As a mountain torrent  
 Divides two cliffs:—The stealthy work of years  
 Has worn the ledge that joined us; though the stream  
 Shows but a thread, 'tis there! Naught but an earthquake  
 Can ever fill the rift.

DE LUCI. Farewell, my lord!  
 I cannot be thine enemy; thy friend  
 Alas! I may not. Henry is my king  
 By right divine of nature.

BECKET. I am more!  
 In grander sovereignty, of nobler state,  
 Not chosen by an accident of birth,  
 But by a higher right, elect of God.

DE LUCI. Being no clerk, my lord, to reason on't,  
 I am the king's man! Fare thee well, my lord.

BECKET. Farewell! (*Exit DE LUCI.*)

Farewell, England and Englishmen!  
 Perchance for ever! 'Tis an easy thing  
 Returning at set time to say farewell,  
 But he who turns his back upon his home

For ever, lingers long, and being gone  
Is not at once departed ; ev'ry tone  
In nature's gamut thrills his exiled heart  
With sad remembrance.

Was it wise, or well,  
To sever thus the knot which circumstance  
Had bound about me ? Was it fear or sloth  
Which bade me thus escape the tortuous maze  
By bursting through the hedge ? Sloth it was not :  
Something, may be, of fear.

Oh, Thomas Becket !  
Yet hast thou much to learn !

May I not take  
A lesson of this soldier, who has dared,  
Resigning all for that he deems the right,  
To bid his wife, his children, starve, to fling  
Back in my face estate and sustenance,  
Outfacing fortune ?

And then those who clung  
About my skirts in love, though knowing all  
That love a curse to them : while I, the Primate,—  
Elect of God, I said,—deny my God,—  
Avoid the battle,—fly.

Weep, eyes, for shame !  
Who shuns the wolf, is shepherd but in name.

END OF SCENE I.—ACT III.

## ACT III.

SCENE II. (A. D. 1170).—*The Traitor's field.*

(Enter PRINCE WILLIAM and FITZURSE.)

WILLIAM. Who would have thought the king so vast a fool ?  
FITZURSE. Not I for one indeed ; his highness shames

Our ev'ry hope.

WILLIAM.                                A month ago he swore,  
Nor pope, nor bishop, no ! nor ev'ry curse  
The Church could thunder, should divert his mind  
From Becket's fall, and now——

FITZURSE. Up kicks the beam,  
And Becket rises.

WILLIAM. See-saw, as you say,

FITZURSE. But neither recantation nor regret  
Has patched the truce between them.

WILLIAM. Not as yet ;  
But follows soon, for Henry, when he mounts  
A novel fancy, plies both whip and spurs  
And gallops it to death.

FITZURSE. May this die soon !

WILLIAM. Amen to that: For, once this folly falls,  
The king, believe me, sir, will straightway leap  
Into another saddle, whip and spur,  
And so o'er hill and dale, through stones and mud,  
Fly to his starting point.

(Enter TRACY, LE BRETON, and RANULPH.)

God save you, sirs !

T., LE B., AND R. And you, my lord.

TRACY.                   Sirs, have you heard the news?

WILLIAM. Old news indeed.

RANULPH.                      And worse for being old,  
Since by so much more time the king's intent  
Is constant to its purpose.

**WILLIAM.** So it shall  
The sooner change.

RANULPH. I think not so, my lord,  
The king has weighty reasons.

**WILLIAM.** Reasons!—Which?  
Show me that this is done of calculation,  
That 'neath this show of friendship and redress  
Is spread a hidden snare, and know me, sir,  
Your debtor ever.

LE BRETON.                    Nay ! No springe is here :  
'Tis but an idle wind has blown the king



West as it blew him east ; comes a new moon  
He shifts another quarter, and so round  
Backing or veering.

RANULPH.                      Something more, methinks.  
Than wind has moved the kingly weathercock :  
Though words indeed are wind.

WILLIAM. What meanest thou?

RANULPH. Something I heard anent an interdict,  
Concerted of the primate and the pope.

TRACY. That is a lusty wind to sway the world.

WILLIAM. But not the king!—He little fears the Church,  
As little loves her :—Ye have seen him all  
At mass or matins, how amongst his hounds  
He restless shifts in's seat, or drowsy yawns  
Drawing his fingers o'er the boarspear's edge,  
Or listless turns the rustling pictured page  
To cheat the preacher's whine, or, happier fate,  
At times he sleeps—Ye've seen him start and stare  
As crashed the last Amen : An interdict !  
Pebbles and peas ! *(Enter HUGH DE MORVILLE.)*

DE MORVILLE.                      Unto the king, my lord ;  
But to the people, lightnings, thunderbolts.

WILLIAM. The people?—If they fear let them recall  
Their fav'rite Becket.

DE MORVILLE.                      This they do, my lord:  
All England shouts for him.

WILLIAM.   Were I the king  
I lent the English but a Norman ear,  
Becket a Norman hand.

DE MORVILLE. 'Twere ill, my lord.

WILLIAM. Lo ! Here is one who loves the proud archbishop !

DE MORVILLE. I love him not, my lord, nor do I hate him  
But as the king shall will.—I am a soldier,  
And being such know naught of policy, ,  
Content to yield obedience.

WILLIAM (*aside*).    A man  
To kill cold-blooded by the king's command,  
To die defending if the king desire,  
But useful to my purpose :—Gentle sir,

The king beneath his seeming kindness  
Disguises well his hate, since thou hast failed  
To catch an inkling of it.

DE MORVILLE. Is this so?

WILLIAM. Aye! Is it not, Fitzurse?

FITZURSE. But yesterday

The king and I discoursed alone upon't;  
"My lord," I said, "hast thou some secret reason"  
"To keep friend Thomas here in Normandy?"

DE MORVILLE. What said the king?

FITZURSE. "Reason," he said, "enough!"

And told me of his dignity, his wealth,  
The popular love and fifty other things;  
At which I smiled.

DE MORVILLE. Scant courtesy, my lord.

FITZURSE. Good policy! For this provoked a question,  
And that a fable——

WILLIAM. Let us hear.

FITZURSE. 'Twas thus,—

*John the ploughman had a wife,  
Joan her name, a sorry scold;  
So exceeding grew the strife,  
Both of them no house could hold.*

*"Out!" said John: "I go" said Joan:  
Every yeoman living nigh  
Hears a tale would melt a stone;  
John had turned her out to die.*

*Neither fair nor market-place,  
Where of old he bought his gear,  
Now may see John's honest face,  
For the neighbours flout and jeer.*

*"Out upon thee, cur!" they cry,  
"With your tale we're well acquaint!"  
Joan the martyr simpers by;  
He a devil, she a saint.*

*John at last, to end the ill,  
Brought his Joan unwilling home ;  
There, when she's unruly still,  
Beats her, and forbids her roam.*

DE MORVILLE. Aye! John and Joan!—I cannot read the

WILLIAM. Oh, head of proof. [fable.

FITZURSE. Not read it?—Priestly Joan,  
Archbishop Joan, let's say, has fled from home,  
And royal John's a devil; better 'twere  
To keep her tongue, now wags in such despite,  
Within the reach of John's right lusty arm.

DE MORVILLE. But this I know; the king despatched to  
Such messages of friendship and love,— [him  
As make me doubt.

WILLIAM. A mere pretence, my lord!  
The corn which, to the yielding lever glued,  
Cheats, cheats, the pecking beak, until the spring  
Flies and the bird is caged.

DE MORVILLE. 'Tis no fair dealing.

WILLIAM. In war, my lord, all's fair.

DE MORVILLE. Or like the king,  
To choose a secret way to win his end.

WILLIAM. Sir!—Wilt thou judge the king?

DE MORVILLE. Nay! Nay! Not I!

WILLIAM. The king does right in all things!—Let him say  
“I order thus,” 'tis ordered well!—Let none  
Dare in my hearing doubt it!—I am his brother,  
His honour mine.

DE MORVILLE. My lord, I doubt thee not;  
This kindness of the king is then a mask  
To hide a frowning face.

WILLIAM. No more, my lord.  
It scarcely needs thy rich experience  
To judge what by this man the king must suffer;  
In name the first, in majesty the second,  
With a divided rule the other shares,  
Nay! e'en usurps: the mitre and the crown  
As one shall rise, the other needs must fall.

- DE MORVILLE. The king then hates him ?
- WILLIAM. Aye ! As do we all,  
Loving the king.
- DE MORVILLE. My lord, I yield to none  
In true allegiance.
- WILLIAM. Wilt thou join with us  
To crush this traitor ?
- DE MORVILLE. Aye ! with my full heart.
- WILLIAM. Then on some happy day a gallant deed——
- DE MORVILLE. A traitor ?—Is he ?——
- WILLIAM. Doubtest thou ?
- DE MORVILLE. Indeed  
I cannot judge.
- WILLIAM. The king shall judge for thee !  
Mistrust us as thou wilt : Agree but this,  
That we together, heart and soul, will work  
The king's decree, aye ! even unto death,  
When so he orders.
- DE MORVILLE. Aye ! to death !
- ALL. To death !  
When wills the king.
- DE MORVILLE. Give me the king's command,  
I am with you in all things.
- WILLIAM. In good time  
Thou'lt have it.
- DE MORVILLE. Gentlemen ! my lord ! Farewell.  
(*Exit DE MORVILLE.*)
- WILLIAM. Farewell ! Thou hammer-head, I hold thy handle.
- RANULPH. My lord, why's this ?—I trust not much this  
Proud to the finger-tips he prates of honour ; [knight :  
I fear lest he may shy at thine intent  
And so perchance unseat our enterprize.
- WILLIAM. In ev'ry mortal nose is hung a ring ;  
The which you pull, the owner follows close :  
In some 'tis wealth, in others honour, some  
Have named it love, but this man labels his  
"My lord the king commands."
- TRACY. Why need we him ?  
He is not of our company.

WILLIAM. E'en so,  
And that the wherefore : Something, pardon me,  
We all are damaged in our reputation.

ALL. My lord !

WILLIAM. I set myself among you, sirs.  
You like it not : Then let me say, that fame  
Has rudely used us.—Now good character  
Is warmer far than furs to cloak a sin,  
Which needs protection : Having not enough  
Amongst us, pardon me, to veil a lie,  
'Twere well to borrow : Morville hath too much,  
He's awkward honest.

FITZURSE. Shall we then divide  
The surplus ?

WILLIAM. Aye ! If Becket die, by hands  
The world misjudges,—there are silly fools  
Might prate of murder, wrought for private ends ;  
But let the king command, we are the slaves  
Of royal policy.

'TRACY. But will he ?

WILLIAM. Aye !  
He will !—Some sudden rage, some new offence,  
Shall from his hasty lips tear out the words,  
Enough to suit our purpose ; never doubt !  
And so the deed is done—of justice, sirs,  
By sentence of the king ; De Morville witness,  
A very honourable man indeed :  
'Tis wise to keep an honourable friend.  
Trust me for this.

LE BRETON. And when, my lord, the signal ?

WILLIAM. Wait in good patience till the time shall serve,  
The king's time, look you !——

*(Enter KING and JOHN OF PAVIA.)*

Welcome, royal brother !

KING. Welcome, Sir William !

*(To JOHN OF PAVIA.)* Pass we farther, sir,  
For private speech.

WILLIAM. My lord, report has grown  
That Becket comes again.

KING. And if he does  
 Shall wine be sour, or wenches hard to win?  
 Trust me, my brother, keep thy tavern ways  
 And live in peace.

WILLIAM. My liege, these gentlemen  
 Are with myself intent to do thee service.

KING. I thank you, gentlemen, and need you not.  
 Farewell! God bless you!—Give you cleaner lives!

WILLIAM (*aside*). But thou shalt serve us all.

Come, gentlemen,  
 The sun is high, and needs his morning draught,  
 Dry lips beget dull thoughts—Farewell, my lord.  
 (*Exeunt omnes except KING and JOHN.*)

KING. It cannot be!

JOHN. My lord, pray think again.  
 His holiness entreats you give the kiss.  
 That which of old 'twixt thee and the archbishop  
 Were but a customary greeting, now  
 Shall be to all the world a patent sign  
 Of amity and reconciliation.

KING. I loved the man, my lord, and oft have kissed him,  
 But never with a hollow heart.

JOHN. Nor now!  
 All that is past!

KING. The thorn is out  
 The sting yet rankles.

JOHN. Common courtesy  
 Demands it of thee, and that royal state  
 Which like a velvet scabbard to a sword  
 Adorns the mightiest.

KING. No discourtesy  
 Bids me refuse the kiss of peace, my lord:  
 I could not an I would—so many nights  
 Has Becket frightened sleep from off my eyes,  
 That e'en his name is grown so weird to me,  
 I startle at it.

JOHN. Put away from thee  
 Such mem'ry of the night!—A glad new day  
 Now dawns for thee and England.

- KING.                               Ye who dwell  
 As 'twere 'neath angels wings, who day by day  
 Find strength in pray'r, who hourly mortify  
 The restive flesh, can scarcely guess, my lord,  
 How hard forgiveness is :—How great a pang  
 It gives to stop a half-delivered blow,  
 And greater yet to throw the sword aside,  
 And greet the foeman friend.
- JOHN.                   The hardest part is done ;  
 The blow is checked, the foe is at thy feet !  
 Oh, Henry ! stifle not thy noble heart,  
 But give thou mercy as thou hop'st for mercy,  
 Full, free, and passing limit.
- KING.                               Nay ! not yet !  
 It is too soon.
- JOHN.                               A little sacrifice  
 Has little merit :—That to which most we cling  
 That most is due to heaven.
- KING.                               Words !—pardon me,  
 I spoke unthinking.
- JOHN.                               I can pardon all,  
 Save thy withdrawal from the kiss of peace.  
 Shall it not be, (I speak as one of the world,)   
 That others, knowing it withheld, shall judge  
 That in thine heart must lie some treachery,  
 Present or future.
- KING.                               By God's eyes, not so !  
 I swear my soul has no concealed ill !  
 In ev'ry tittle shall my word be true ;  
 Becket shall be in all things yet to come  
 Blameless of all is past. My hand I'll give,  
 And with my hand my honour, but my lips  
 His kiss would blister.
- JOHN.                               Sir, I will to Becket  
 Report as much as profits ;—he perchance  
 May waive his right, and to the outward sign  
 Prefer the inward friendship.
- KING.                               Tell him more !  
 At my return to England, he shall ask

And I will yield, the kiss and all things else  
May make him mine.

JOHN. Good news indeed, my lord.

(*Exit JOHN OF PAVIA.*)

KING. (*While he speaks the Lords of the Court enter.*)

A little moment and he comes again !  
Friend Thomas ! Noble Thomas ! Such a man  
As hath not in my double realm his double.  
I warrant me his heart is full as mine :  
Ah me ! We both are weary ! Should he come  
To greet me with that old glad face of his  
I could not take him coldly by the hand :—  
Much hath he vexed me, others love me well ;  
But lies there something in the man has pow'r  
To outlive hate, to conquer love, to bid  
Even kings serve him. Should he smile at me  
With that wide honest eye of his on mine,  
Then must I—no ! by Heav'n !—I cannot tell :  
The day shall see.

LEICESTER. My liege, a company  
Comes hither.

KING. Stand we here to greet.

LEICESTER. My liege,

I see them now : 'tis Becket.

KING. Say, my lord,

The primate lord archbishop.

1ST LORD. Sets the wind

So in the sails ? I'll trim my helm and steer

A novel course. (*The King walks up and down.*)

(*To 2ND LORD.*) A most wise man, my lord.

2ND LORD. Aye, more ! A great man, highly to be prized  
For England's honour.

DE MORVILLE (*to the King.*) Of thy grace, my liege ;  
Comes he as friend ?

KING. Aye ! As the best of friends,  
To all the honour that my hand can give,  
By all the love my inmost heart bestows.

DE MORVILLE (*aside*). I am astray : let time unriddle all !  
Stand we aside, and watch events go by.



(*Enter BECKET, JOHN, HERBERT, GRIMM, and attendants.*)

KING. Thomas !

BECKET. My liege ! (*Kneels ; King raises him.*)

KING. At last. (*Embraces BECKET.*)

JOHN. The kiss of peace !

(*BECKET is ill at ease, and half resists the King's embrace.*

*Nobles and attendants fall back, leaving KING, BECKET, and JOHN.*)

KING. How many years have come and gone since we  
 Stood thus together : give me thy hand again,  
 That I be sure thou'rt here !—'twas dreary, Thomas,  
 To see thee not.

BECKET. I joy to see my lord  
 In such good seeming.

JOHN. All the Christian world,  
 Which late lay weeping at the Church's feet,  
 Welcomes with joy the end of this disunion.

KING. I ever loved thee, Thomas !—At my worst  
 I would not harm thee ; but thy giant strength,  
 Like some great island rock, frowned over me,  
 As 'gainst thy hardness ev'ry wave of mine  
 My love, my hate, my power, my arguments,  
 Splashed into frothy foam and moved thee not :  
 And hence this trouble came.

BECKET. Yet once again  
 I must of thine indulgence pray a hearing.

KING. Thomas, speak on !—This is no day to keep  
 Betwixt us silence : Tell thy mind upon't,  
 And as thou wilt, I certes do thy pleasure.

BECKET. My lord the king, it is the ancient office  
 And proudest duty of the Primate's see,  
 To set the royal crown of England's kings  
 On each anointed head. Despite of this,  
 My lord of York has dared with insolent  
 Rebellious hand replace me in the service.

KING. My lord of York has crowned my son Lord Henry :  
 It was at my desire. Am I not king,  
 And shall I not be master in my realm,  
 To make it's usage ?

BECKET. Ere thou wert a king  
That usage reigned.—Usage say I indeed,—  
'Tis more, a right I hold from hands long dead :  
And not a jot will I, their heir, abate  
Of that which honoured Canterbury held.

KING. A right ! It is no right ! The Conqueror  
Was crowned by York ; The Pope himself gave me  
That I should choose the hand to crown my son.

BECKET. When Canterbury is not, or from death,  
Or from some ill of man's device, then York  
May foster England's Church, but none the less  
Serves he the other present.—Never yet  
Has Canterbury yielded ! Never will !  
Give me mine office, king !

JOHN. Noble sirs,  
Ye do endanger peace : may we not find  
Some easy resolution for this problem.

BECKET. I seek no ill against my lord of York,  
Nor would I strain a hair to low'r his state ;  
Nay ! Inasmuch as he too serves the Church,  
I would enhance his dignity : But this  
Doth blemish not alone my personal honour,  
But that of England's primacy : All else  
I may of conscience do, I am right glad  
To work for York's aggrandisement.

KING. My lord,  
No more, I pray ! Thou hast a double right,  
To love my son : I gave him to thy hands  
To shape and furnish ; he doth as a scholar  
Love thee his master, as a friend his friend,  
And as a king doth so much honour thee  
That any is thy foe is of that being  
Most hateful to him.

BECKET. He is such a son  
As needs no praise of mine, and such a prince  
That all men praise him.

KING. Hear me then, my lord ;  
I, that am king of England, hold the Church  
Of Canterbury first in all the land,

And in this matter sought I no dishonour  
 To her or you ; but since ye are aggrieved,  
 And in this question exercised, I vow  
 I will in all things give relief and aid,  
 Such as may heal her bruised dignity.

BECKET. That vow do I invoke ; for some there are  
 Who being set beneath me, suffragans,  
 Have of their pride oppressed me ; so I pray  
 That in this matter of Church discipline,  
 I may of my supremacy give answer  
 To such as shamed my office.

KING. I to all  
 Who thus have injured us, who thus have striv'n  
 To raise a mist of hate between our eyes,  
 Will in my own good time find such an answer,  
 As their great wrong and treachery deserve.

BECKET (*kneeling*). Oh ! Glad am I to live to see this day !  
 My liege and king ! my blessing go with thee,  
 As doth my love for ever.

KING (*raising him*). Furthermore,  
 In full requital to thine outraged Church,  
 (As public the atonement as the trespass,)  
 I will at my return devise that thou,  
 With fuller pomp and grander ceremony,  
 Shalt crown my son and daughter king and queen.  
 (*BECKET kneels and kisses the King's hand.*)

BECKET. Now is the measure of my cup o'erful,  
 And sorrow's cloud is melted at the sun  
 Of such true clemency.

KING. Rise ! Rise, my lord !  
 Nothing is now betwixt us.

Gentlemen !  
 Now in the sight of all assembled here,  
 I do restore my lord of Canterbury  
 To every fief, to each appurtenance ;  
 And farther charge you all, by your respect  
 And love for me, to serve him as myself  
 With all due honour and obedience.

BECKET. May heav'n so bless thee ! Go, my son, in peace !

Live well ! Live gladly ! God be good to thee !

(*KING and BECKET pass up stage talking.*)

JOHN. Evil is passed to-day : as for to-morrow,  
Being so old, I may escape it's sorrow.

END OF SCENE II.—ACT III.

## ACT III.

SCENE III.—*A room in the Abbey of Bec.*

(*The Empress on a couch.—A Nun attending.*)

NUN. May I in aught else serve your highness ?

EMPRESS. Nay !

Go, daughter ! I would be alone awhile.

NUN. The Abbess Mother bade me tender, madam,  
All our poor aid can offer : 'Tis but little  
Compared with royal usage.

EMPRESS. Daughter mine,  
This to the Mother : Sick, aye ! e'en to death,  
And very weary of this evil world,  
I, that have lived in misery in courts,  
Come to die happy in the house of Heav'n.

NUN. God give your highness peace !

EMPRESS. Amen, my daughter !

(*Exit Nun.*)

EMPRESS. Ah ! With what other eyes the world is viewed  
When we no more can hope to see it long :  
It is as though we all our lives have been  
As babes, unfit to judge of relative distance ;  
For with what huge proportions glares that now

Which late at the horizon glimmered weak,  
 And how far off, how faint, how small a thing  
 Is that great purpose which o'ershadowed all,  
 Now less than shadow!—To a toddling child  
 A new found toy will fill the total day,  
 And evening falls ere sad satiety :  
 But coming to full years, when greater thoughts,  
 (Only by contrast, great,) fill perfect age,  
 Small things can please no longer, toys or men ;  
 Something yet more is needed, and so palls  
 First one and then another, till the world  
 Is empty as a book of riddling jests,  
 Of which we know the answers.

(*A knock heard.*)

Enter !

(*Enter BECKET.*)

Thou ?

Why art thou here ?

BECKET.

Madam, from gratitude.

EMPRESS. From gratitude ? To me ?

BECKET.

Madam, I am

As one who starving in a lonely wood,  
 Past hope, past daring, finds that while he slept,  
 Worn out by weeping, Sorrow's gracious sleep,  
 Some hidden hand has brought him sustenance ;  
 And with it strength to tread the backward path  
 Along the footsteps, till he reach the place  
 Which houses her who saved him.

EMPRESS.

Thomas Becket !

I, who in pride have dared miscall thee churl,  
 And frowned on thine advancement, in the faith  
 That noble blood alone made noble men ;  
 Now in the withered days of my existence,  
 Do with mine inmost heart claim kin with thee,  
 (The cousinship of sorrow joins us twain,)  
 And as my cousin——

BECKET.

Madam !

EMPRESS.

Bid you welcome !

Nay ! Hear me out ! Yet more, I kneeling pray

Thy blessing, noble Becket.

(*Tries to kneel.*)

BECKET (*raising her.*)

Madam, I——

EMPRESS. Pass me thy courtesy, give me thy love!  
 Am I so bound by wretched pomp and pride,  
 That even at the grave thou'lt call me "Madam!"

BECKET. My sister in the Church! Kneel not to me!  
 Both have been wrong, let us together kneel  
 To Him who knows not race or lineage.

EMPRESS. Mine eyes are glad to see thee, holy Father,  
 As was my heart to know thy wrongs redressed.

BECKET. I have no wrongs: Has any striv'n with me,  
 E'en to the death; comes he with open hand  
 And open heart to greet me, all my soul  
 Shall swear he never wronged me: That is but  
 A poor forgiveness which can aught remember  
 Of that forgiven.

EMPRESS. Musing here I sat,  
 And 'gainst my will my thoughts, like feathered shafts,  
 Flew up the wind to thee:—Then at the moment,  
 Came there a message from his Holiness  
 Anent thy cause, as 'twere a breath from heav'n,  
 To guide me thither.

BECKET. Good and gentle sister,  
 Who, spite thine age and thine infirmity,  
 Hast from thy cloistered calm above the waste  
 Of overwhelming waters brought to us  
 The olive branch of peace,—

EMPRESS. Could I do less?  
 Think this: How many men have these weak hands,  
 Unarmed but bloody, sacrificed, alas!  
 Before the altar of my pride?—'Twas little,  
 Little indeed, to lift my failing voice  
 For peace and harmony.

BECKET. I have no words  
 To thank thee, sister.

EMPRESS. Let us pass from this!  
 How fares the king?

BECKET. So well, I scarce believe,  
 To see his ruddy face so freshly gay,  
 That six long years have past since last we rode  
 Together with the hawks. His eye as bright,

His step as firm——

EMPRESS.                      And that hot hasty temper  
As wild as ever.

BECKET.                      Half for that I love him !  
A smouldering fire smokes long : Give me a flame  
Ardent and swift.—He who can hate can love,  
And for the quickness of his anger comes  
Forgiveness quicker.

**EMPRESS.** Aye! Too much at times!  
As to the queen—?

BECKET. Is with the king at Rouen.

EMPRESS. I ask not where she is, but what she does.

BECKET. My life lies little in the braveries  
Of courtly splendour.

EMPRESS. Hear me, Thomas Becket !  
Dost know the queen ?

BECKET. Aye, madam, was I not  
A courtier once?

EMPRESS. Mistake me not ! I mean  
Her public folly and her private ill ;  
Working such scandal at the royal court,  
That all men whisper, look askance, and see  
Matter for wagging tongues.—Art thou as blind  
As husband Henry ?

BECKET. Madam, I see nothing !  
That I may hear I never did regard ;  
For well I know that many in the world  
Prefer e'en lies to silence.

**EMPRESS.**                      Something thou'st heard !

BECKET. When any sound, is hateful to my heart,  
Knocks at the porch o' my ears, I shut the door.

EMPRESS. Thou'lt not deceive me!—Something there must be,  
Or why such monstrous rumours in the wind.

BECKET. I know this: Eyes and ears both see and hear,  
Not that which is, but that their owners will:  
And he who all his life has looked for evil,  
Finds it where'er he goes, within the palace  
With royal robes bedecked, or in the hut  
Enwrapt in filthy weeds: The world to each

Is an enlarged copy of himself  
 Who sees it : That men speak, is still themselves  
 Translated.

EMPRESS. Idle words !—When goest thou  
 To England and thy see ?

BECKET. In some few days.  
*(Trumpets heard.)*

EMPRESS. A trumpet !—listen ! Comes there aught to me  
 With such a summons ?

BECKET. Sister, I will go :  
 Whoe'er it be, 'twere well thou wert alone.

EMPRESS. Thou'lt come again to me ?

BECKET. Aye ! In an hour.  
*(Sound of trumpets. Exit BECKET.)*

EMPRESS. Again ! A royal trumpet ! Hark to it !  
 So blares the blatant wind which fills our lives,  
 As loud, and as soon silent. *(Enter Nun.)*

NUN. Madam ! I—

EMPRESS. Enter, my daughter !

NUN. Madam, at the gate  
 A lady seeks your highness.

EMPRESS. Who is she ?

NUN. I know not, madam : but she shines as bright,  
 With jewelled ornaments and glitt'ring robes,  
 As doth our Lady at a festival.

EMPRESS. One daughter only in this Christian world  
 Had come in state to see a dying mother :  
 Admit the queen !

NUN.. The queen ! Alack !  
 But queens are gaudy things.

EMPRESS. Aye ! Some, my child : *(Exit Nun.)*  
 And wicked things are some, and false are many,  
 But few so utterly— *(Enter QUEEN.)*

QUEEN. How fare you, madam ?

EMPRESS. But ill, my time is passing.

QUEEN. Say not so !

Ere long at Rouen thou wilt joy with us.

EMPRESS. Nor there, nor elsewhere ever.

QUEEN. I have brought



Such news as needs must win thee from this nest ;  
Or like the mourning dove thou'lt pine away  
For very languor.—Fie, what sombre weeds !

EMPRESS. The fitter for my person.

QUEEN. Come away !  
This cloistered air lacks life, there's poison in't ;  
And this lethargic stillness hath a chill  
To freeze the heart, and savours of the tomb.

EMPRESS. And like the tomb gives rest.

QUEEN. Nay, mother mine ;  
Tomorrow little Mand, thy godchild, weds  
Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony,  
A very gallant man, and there will be  
Great doings, feastings, sports, and tournaments,  
Where noble knights for love of beauteous dames,  
Shall break spears bravely.

EMPRESS (*aside*). She yet loves her toys.

QUEEN. And there is more : Duke Conan, dead at last,  
Has unto Geoffrey Brittany bequeathed,  
And day by day a crowd of Breton knights,  
Each prouder than the last, comes trooping in,  
Till all the town's ablaze with waving plumes,  
And handsome faces are as common sights  
As birds in summer.

EMPRESS. What are these to me ?

QUEEN. Reject this moody dulness, gentle mother,  
And come with me to-day :—I had forgot ;  
By universal verdict of the knights,  
I am elected o'er the tournament  
As Queen of Beauty.

EMPRESS. Pah ! Too much of this !  
I cannot come ; my age, infirmity,  
Must plead excuse.

QUEEN. Nay ! No excuse shall serve.

EMPRESS. Hear then, I will not come ! Must thou, whose age  
Had better taught thee wisdom, flourish thus  
Thy painted face, thy padded symmetry  
Before thy gazing minions ! Get thee gone !  
Presume not thus to flaunt thy borrowed grace,

Thy mincing gait, thy studied youthfulness,  
Full in the face of death.

QUEEN. My mother! I——

Who can have taught her this?

EMPRESS. I know you now:

Death is a rapid teacher; many things,  
Which to the eye of health are blurred and dim,  
Are in the weary tossing of the night  
To sickness patent clear. I spare you much,  
For much I know: Yet more I guess and pass:  
Do thou spare me and go!

QUEEN. Not till I know

Whence thou hast learned the occasion of this speech:  
Death, sickness, that for girls!—I am a woman,  
And I will know who whispered this to thee.

EMPRESS. Experience somewhat, somewhat intuition,  
Or by what name you call the second sight  
Which comes by living.

QUEEN. Intuition! Pshaw!

Thine intuition hath two legs, a tongue,  
A villainous tongue! Would God I had it here,  
Thine intuition! Were it e'er so great,  
My dagger levelled it! Who was the man?

EMPRESS. It was no man.

QUEEN. The woman, then?

EMPRESS. Thyself!

Thy wand'ring eye, thy too-alluring glances,  
Thine agony to age, thy mock of youth,  
Thy company with men of half thy years,  
Thy weariness of children, those thine own,  
Whoe'er their father——

QUEEN. Ah! This is too much!

EMPRESS. Were not the king as blind as thou art vile,  
He would have seen it.

QUEEN. Nay! He loves me not!

EMPRESS. For twenty years has any ever loved thee,  
Save for his purposes?

QUEEN. Has any loved me?

I——

EMPRESS. Stay! I would not have thee blazon out  
A roll of conquests: That I know, I know,  
Enough and more: Go thou, and let the past  
Die in repentance.

QUEEN (*aside*). Will she tell the king?  
If I should think it!

EMPRESS. Go! I loved thee once,  
Or that I thought was thee. I stand too near  
The bar of death to judge thee. Go!

QUEEN (*aside*). The king!—  
His rage!—A dungeon!—Death!—She is but weak;—  
A little and then silence!—She may babble  
Even unknowing!—White as my hands may be,  
They have sufficient strength!—I'll do it!—Madam!

EMPRESS. Begone! I weary of you.

QUEEN. List to me!  
At my dictation speak!—I swear by God——

EMPRESS. I will not! I——

QUEEN. Then, curse thee, die!  
(*Rushes at her.*)

EMPRESS. Help! Help!  
(*Enter BECKET.*)

BECKET. Woman or tigress, back!

QUEEN. Thou here! Ha! Ha!  
Her highness' intuition, second sight!  
Have at thee, liar!

BECKET. Lady! Not too far,  
Lest I forget thy name!

QUEEN. My name! What is't?  
Have not ye two, thou and this beldame here,  
From off me wrung it, trampled it to ordure?  
Peace! Peace! No words!—Not even blood can wash  
The filth thy covert hand has filched to fling  
From thine own midden.

EMPRESS. Becket, take her hence!  
This is too horrible!—Would I were dead,  
Ere came this whirlwind on me.

BECKET. Madam, go!  
The Empress swoons.

QUEEN.                                    Though earth should yawning ope  
To gulf us all, I stir not, till she swear——

EMPRESS. I will not !

BECKET. What?

QUEEN. To serve no more as conduit  
For thy swift running lies. Now hear me, madam !  
He who has dared to thus impeach a queen,  
Is of the lowest dregs of London born,  
And he so quick to slander thus a woman,  
Has such a woman loved as I——

BECKET. Speak not of her!

QUEEN. Fair Rosamond !

BECKET. Peace, fiend incarnate! Go!

QUEEN. Ha! Have I touched thee? Hast some softer spot  
Amidst thy purity to make thee man?

BECKET. Help! Help! The empress dies!

QUEEN. Nay! not so soon!

Doth she?—I go ! But mark me, lying lord ;  
If e'er a woman's word had strength to kill  
Thine hours are counted ! (*Enter Nuns and attendants.*)  
Madam, fare thee well !  
God give thee better days ! (*aside*) And few of them !  
(*Exit QUEEN.*)

EMPRESS. Ah! Is she gone?

BECKET. Aye, madam !

EMPRESS. Give me ease:

So! Lift me up! I have not long to live.

Good Becket, leave me not.—Where art thou now?

BECKET. Here, madam, at thy calling.

EMPRESS. Is she gone?

Thou didst not answer, Becket.

BECKET. In her speech  
Was so much fact, I could not quickly answer  
To such a wordy tangle. (*aside*) In good sooth,  
A lie cuts deeply when it's edged with truth.

END OF SCENE III.—ACT III.

## ACT IV.

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SCENE I. (A. D. 1170.)—*In front of the Church of St. Mary, Southwark. The houses decorated and the street full of people.*

(Enter RANULPH and ROBERT DE BROU in disguise. MATILDA walking in the crowd.)

---

MATILDA. Good ware! Good ware! Open your purses,  
(Sings) *The sun is hot, the day is fair* [gentles.  
*But gentle Thomas needs must die.*

And here are two I know not.

RANULPH. Save you, lass!

What do you sell?

MATILDA. Nothing sell I to you.

Look! Look! There's blood on's fingers!

1ST CITIZEN. Gentlemen,

She means no harm! Great sorrow long ago

Has turned her brain.

MATILDA. Come, gentles, buy my ware!

(Sings) *Poor lover, dear lover, why must thou die?*

RANULPH. These be brave doings, sir! A gallant welcome

Have ye of Southwark furnished to my lord.

2ND CITIZEN. Could we do less, when he is one of us?

Yes! I, plain Gilbert Arkell, claim akin.

To Thomas Becket.—Thus it is you see;

One Alfred, ere the Conqueror was come,

Married Elfgiva, so———

ROBERT. Oh; rare old man!

Better begin at Adam.

2ND CITIZEN. Nay! not so!

Thus were I kin to thee, for ev'ry knave  
Has Adam for his father.

RANULPH. Fairly hit!

(*Aside*). Best keep a quiet tongue, or loose thy sword:  
These Londoners, like sable cats, are smooth,  
So you may stroke them straight, but raise their hair  
Across, and sparks shall fly.—Pray, gentle sir,  
Whence comes it that th' Archbishop is so lov'd?

MATILDA. (*Sings*) *The holly 's green, the holly 's red,  
And my true love, alas! is dead.*

1ST CITIZEN. E'en for himself; for he's no coward, sir:  
But stands against our swagg'ring Norman king  
Stiff as a quarter-staff.

ROBERT. Thou'dst best take care!  
The king can hear across the sea.

1ST CITIZEN. The king!  
God bless him, he'll not hurt us! 'Tis not he  
That sets us grinding teeth, but those he sends,—  
A very scurvy, poor and drivelling set,—  
To rule in merry England.

RANULPH. Such as———who?—

1ST CITIZEN. Oh! There's a many of them.

RANULPH. Tell me one.

1ST CITIZEN. Ranulph de Broc—Thou know'st him?

RANULPH. Nay, sir!—I——

MATILDA. (*Sings*) *A poor fool, a very fool,  
Would be handle, and is the tool.*

1ST CITIZEN. Aye! He's a wicked one. But hath a brother  
One Robert, is a right-down arrant knave.

MATILDA. (*Sings*) *So foul a thing, a thing so evil,  
To buy his soul would cheat the devil.*

2ND CITIZEN. He was a priest they say: Too vile for that  
He blossomed to a monk, and was disfroked:  
And now has cut himself adrift from Holy Church  
To serve his cousin Satan.

ROBERT. 'Tis too much!  
Out sword, and at him!

RANULPH. Silence, on your life!

Let him but shout "Clubs! Clubs!" and we are lost;  
 For such a crowd of prentices would pour  
 From every street, as sent us limping back,  
 A sorry pair, to Saltwood.—Let's away;

MATILDA. (*Sings*) *Let owls, who fly by night,  
 When day is nigh take flight.*

1ST CITIZEN. Gentles! Ye go not so! Here is my house!  
 Come ye within, and quaff an honest cup  
 To Becket's health!

RANULPH. I pray you pardon us!  
 Our journey's hasty.

1ST CITIZEN. Nay! You go not so;  
 Here's wine, and mead, and good October ale;  
 Choose at your liking—so—now after me:  
 To Thomas Becket, London citizen,  
 God bless him! (*Enter PENDA.*)

ALL. Aye! God bless him!

ROBERT. Ev'ry toast  
 Smacks of the wine: I'd drink the devil's health  
 In such as this.

1ST CITIZEN. And curse his enemies,  
 And crush them thus! (*Breaks his cup.*)

RANULPH AND ROBERT. And curse his enemies!  
 And crush them thus!

PENDA. I' faith he's damned himself:  
 Good day, Sir Ranulph! Save your Reverence!

1ST CITIZEN. Why! Who are you? Let's have a look at you!

ROBERT. Stand off! (*Draws his sword.*)

2ND CITIZEN. Who are ye?

ROBERT. Stand aside, I say!

1ST CITIZEN (*to PENDA*). Art sure of them?

PENDA. As of myself!—I served  
 At Saltwood overlong.

1ST CITIZEN. Clubs! Clubs!

ROBERT. Give place!  
 Or by our Lady——

1ST CITIZEN. Curse you! Have at you!  
 Ye spawn of Satan!

ALL. Clubs! Clubs! Prentices!

(RANULPH and ROBERT are beaten and driven off, with  
their swords broken, cloaks torn, etc.)

1ST CITIZEN. Brave boys, we've trounced them well; another

Together all: (Shouts heard.) [cup

God save the lord archbishop!

(The shouts draw nearer; all crowd to see the procession, to  
meet which the Canons advance from the Church.)

MATILDA. (Sings) *Alas! that I ever was born:*

*He was so bright, he was so bright!*

*He told me his love at the morn*

*And died at night, and died at night!*

(Enter BECKET, with WINCHESTER, etc., while the crowd  
throw cloaks before him, and press to kiss his hand.)

(Shouts.) "God bless the good archbishop!"

BECKET. My brother citizens! Good people all!

I had not thought of this:—I had not guessed:—

Ye do me too much honour. Bless you all!

I am no more archbishop! See me now

Just Thomas Becket, one of you, a son

Of goodly Southwark,—glad to greet you all;

So glad i' faith, he has no words to tell it,

And, had he words, so glad he cannot speak,

For such a trembling in the throat as comes

To ev'ry wand'rer when his neighbours meet

To cheer him home. I'll never leave you more,

Come well or ill!—Go to!—No foolish tears

Shall stain such happy welcome! Out upon't!

These silly eyes see dimly through their mist,

Or that is Gilbert.

2ND CITIZEN. Aye! my lord, of old

Your father's gossip.

BECKET. Ever friend of mine,

Since first I rode cock-horse upon thy knee.

And thou! I know thee!

1ST CITIZEN. Geoffrey, good my lord!

BECKET. Thou wert a stripling when I saw thee last.

1ST CITIZEN. And thou, my lord, a youth.

BECKET. So long ago?

Even a weary life is quickly past.



WINCHESTER. Pray you, my lord, to choose my honoured house  
To roof your head to-night.

BECKET. With thanks, my lord,  
I meet your offer : But 'tis right and due  
That, ere we think of comfort, we should first  
Thank Heav'n that all the perils of the way  
Are safely ended.

(*To a Canon*). If our brother will  
Permit us use his church, pass we within :  
For so great happiness as gilds to-day  
Cannot be rightly finished save by prayer.  
(*The procession passes into the church. The crowd remains talking.*)

MATILDA. My ware ! My ware ! Good people, buy my ware !  
(*Sings*) *Sadly the evening dies after day,*  
*Sadly my true love faded away.*  
(*Enter soldiers, Archbishop of YORK, Bishops of SALISBURY*  
*and LONDON, RANULPH and ROBERT DE BROU, and JOCELINE*  
*DE ARUNDEL.*)

JOCELINE. Is this the rabble ? Get you home, you curs !  
Here ! Kennel ! Kennel ! or I have some here  
Will lend the lash.

1ST CITIZEN. We were but come, my lord,  
To greet th' archbishop.

JOCELINE. So much the worse for thee.  
Two Norman gentlemen are hunted down  
By all you ragged English, and ye claim  
This your excuse—"We come to greet a traitor."

1ST CITIZEN. A traitor ?

JOCELINE. Out you pass, nor bandy words !  
Is this the loyalty of London town  
To mate with him is Henry's enemy ?

1ST CITIZEN. Something we heard of reconciliation,  
Of friendship and forgiveness.

ROBERT. Out, you hound !  
What has the king to do with such a thing,  
Save of his clemency ? Are ye to judge ?

JOCELINE. Begone ! And keep your holiday at home,  
Or some of you shall take cracked heads with you

And bloody jerkins: Ye, that are citizens,  
I charge you by mine office, that tomorrow  
Ye do attend me at my house and give  
Good bail for good behaviour.

1st CITIZEN. We will not!  
Where is thy warrant? Hast it of the king  
Or of his justices?

JOCELINE. Arrest this man!  
Sweep me the streets! Drive all these brawlers home!  
(*The citizens are driven out, and soldiers are placed to guard  
the door of the church.*)

(*The church-doors open. Enter BECKET.*)

BECKET. What have we here? Sir Joceline of Louvaine?

JOCELINE. Rather of Arundel.

BECKET. I had forgot  
Thy new-found honour: Would'st thou aught with me?  
Where are my children?

JOCELINE. Children! Tender ones!  
Their infant play hath cost these gentlemen  
Some little pain: Thy babes bear clubs, my lord.

BECKET. Is't so indeed? I pray you pardon them.  
Can I in aught repair?

ROBERT (*aside*). Thou shalt in time!

BECKET. Much am I grieved that this dissension fell  
On my home-coming.

JOCELINE. Therefore get thee back!  
I bear an order from the king lord Henry——

BECKET. Father or son?

JOCELINE. The king at Winchester.

BECKET. The king doth honour me.

JOCELINE. Nay, not much honour.  
Hear to the end!—I, Henry, king of England,  
Do of authority to me deputed  
By my most royal father, charge thee, Thomas,  
Primate of England, that thou come not hither:  
And, being well-informed by certain hands,  
That thou hast in intention to proceed  
About thy diocese, I order thee,  
On pain of my displeasure, turn thy face

To thy cathedral city ; stir not thence,  
Till future orders license thy departure !

BECKET. Young Henry wrote this ?

JOCELINE. Aye ! In loyal speech

The younger king.

BECKET (*aside*). He whom I hold so dear !

How often in the early happy days  
Laid he his cheek to mine, with such caress  
Was almost womanly : " Dear father Thomas !"  
" When I am king," said he, " I'll stand by thee,  
And none shall touch thee save he risk my spear !"  
With twenty other foolish loving words,  
As " I shall love thee ever," or " Till death  
Thou art my father !" Evil fare the crown  
Which so can canker hearts !—Can kings be men ?  
Or lies there subtle poison in their state  
To curse their each good quality ?—My lord !  
I marvel much—

JOCELINE. But shew obedience !

Spare me thy homily, and go thy way,  
Or these shall lead thee.

BECKET. Force !—Know this, my lord :

Were ev'ry man thou hast increased to fifty,  
Aye ! to a thousand men, wert thou the king,  
Ye all should fail before my planted foot,  
To move me home.—Beware ! The Church hath arms !

JOCELINE. Preach if thou wilt, but go ! That is mine errand.

BECKET. Ungentle Arundel, thou churlish lord,  
Acquaint the king from me, that of set purpose  
I did propose to keep my Christmas feast—

MATILDA. Beware the knife, my lord !—Beware the knife !

BECKET. Who is this woman ? Treat her gently, sir !

1ST SOLDIER. She's but a witch, we'll duck her !

BECKET. Touch her not !

God hath afflicted her, let man keep silence !

Off hands !—And rest thou here in peace.

MATILDA. (*Sings.*) *A bonny, bonny lord was he,  
A pretty, pretty lady she !  
But they died, alas ! they died.*

Beware the knife, my lord !

BECKET. Grimm, take her hence :  
See to her case !—My lord, 'twas my intent  
To keep my Christmas feast at Canterbury ;  
And, for the reverence which I bear the king,  
I will at once return, and there await  
Another message :—Pray the messenger  
Have studied manners more.

JOCELINE. 'Tis well, my lord !  
There is another matter yet ; for here  
My lord of York, my lord of Salisbury,  
And he of London fain would speak with thee.

BECKET. This is no soldier's question, save so far  
As touches discipline : Stand thou aside !  
I there obeyed, I here perforce command :  
Speak on ! Thou first, Roger, my lord of York !

YORK. My lord of Canterbury, here stand I,  
Archbishop as thyself, and by my oath  
I would not change with thee.—What evil wind  
Has blown such proud presumption to thy heart,  
That thou alone defiest all ?—My lord,  
I pray your patience !

BECKET. I am like to need it :  
Speak on, my lord !

YORK. Of my offence to thee,  
Or that thou call'st "offence," I speak not here,  
Nor will I ever to thy judgment bow ;  
But these, thy suffragans, for these I ask,  
What have they done ?—Has any witnessed evil ?  
Or have they injured aught except thy pride ?  
Is not forgiveness charged us ; thou and I  
How often have we published out the text,  
And shall we shew, but never lead the way ?  
When thou wert gone, my lord, the Church had peace ;  
Ere thou wert come was peace ; but now we hear  
From ev'ry point the shock and din of war ;  
We weary of you.

BECKET. And before I go  
Shall fear me !

YORK. Out upon such words!  
 I fear you?—Never!—Look you well, my lord,  
 Or peradventure he who threatens falls!  
 'Twere well, proud prelate——

BECKET. I have heard enough!  
 Now hear me, York, thou pattern of forgiveness!  
 Has any sued for mercy in such terms  
 As these of thine; has any ever dared  
 As thus to mingle curses with his pray'rs?  
 Enough! No more! 'Tis mine to speak at last.  
 Thou hast abased the splendour of thy see  
 By petty theft of that thou thought'st unguarded,  
 From 'neath thy cope hath stretched a filching hand;  
 And, noble of the Church, hast not disdained  
 To strike her root when thou could'st strike unhurt.  
 I speak not of thy coward insolence;  
 I say but this; thou'st shamed the Church which fed,  
 Which raised, which throned thee—vilest of the vile,  
 Thou'st dragged her honour in thy native dust.

YORK. My lord!—Before these men?

BECKET. Before these men?  
 Before the world the impious act was done,  
 It is no secret I may spare thee here;  
 In open scorn hast thou usurped my place,  
 With open scorn I here chastise thy crime:  
 The crown too holy for thy touch, the oil  
 Was blessed, nay! banned by thee, hast thou, usurper,  
 Dared to profane: I marvel that a curse  
 Blasts not this kingdom for thine evil deed.

ROBERT (*aside*). Thou art the curse!—A curse my willing  
 Shall soon absolve. [sword]

BECKET. Enough! My lord, go by!  
 Thou hast thine answer, I another task.  
 (*To the Bishops*) Ye insubordinate, who dared abet  
 These wicked doings, hear my charge to you!  
 Bishop of London, thou of Salisbury,  
 Thus saith my lord the Pope; Forinasmuch  
 As ye, forgetful of your orders, oaths  
 And discipline, have bound yourselves to fools

And followed folly, come ye not again  
 To any meeting of the Christian Church ;  
 Put not your hands to meat, your lips to wine,—  
 LONDON. My lord, your pardon !

BECKET. Grovel not to me !  
 Not mine the sentence : Tear your robes from you ;  
 Ye are disfrooked, disowned ; as curséd things  
 Creep ye upon the earth, until such time  
 As by repentance e'en your sin be purged ;  
 Let no man touch you, minister to you  
 By word or deed, in sickness or in health !  
 With book and candle hath the Father cursed ;  
 Aye ! and ye shall be cursed. Go hence, profane !

JOCELINE. The Church hath arms indeed.

BECKET. To you, my lord,  
 I have my promise giv'n :—I will return  
 With this my company to mine own see.  
 Farewell, my lord. (*Exeunt BECKET, etc.*)

JOCELINE. Farewell, thou half and half  
 Soldier and priest, in all a very devil.  
 (*Exeunt JOCELINE, etc., except YORK and Bishops.*)

LONDON. Enough of this, my lord, I tremble now  
 Before th'exceeding passion of his voice.

SALISBURY. 'Twere best to yield ; his tongue has iron in't.

YORK. And thy head gold : Fear not to lose thy see !  
 Stand by the king, and he shall serve you well ;  
 But if ye be fainthearted, swerve from him,  
 Shall of a surety strip you of your all,  
 And leave you beggars.

LONDON. Beggars are we now :  
 Aye, worse !—Are castaways, to all profane,  
 By God accursed.

YORK. A curse on cheerful hearts  
 But lightly sits ! Thank Heav'n, my coffers hold  
 Eight thousand pounds ! I'll ev'ry penny on't  
 Disburse to right this quarrel : Golden arrows  
 Shall soon bring down this fellow's soaring pride ;  
 Aye ! he himself by this same pride shall fall.

SALISBURY. I hope, my lord, but cannot see, good end.

YORK. Nay! Nay! Not yet! At Rouen is good end:

We'll to the king, for he alone can curb

This vaulting jade: Pass we to Normandy!

There is our castle, thence our shafts shall fly!

SALISBURY. But Becket to the king is reconciled.

YORK. No wound is quickly healed is rightly healed;

And very little poison swells a scar

To mortal gangrene: That was done to-day

Played with a certain art, shall sway the king

Against his bias: Follow where I lead;

To Normandy, my lords, with all good speed!

END OF SCENE I.—ACT IV.

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## ACT IV.

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SCENE II.—*The ante-room of the King's chamber, Castle of Bur.*

(Enter the QUEEN from the King's chamber.)

QUEEN. At last he sleeps: I weary of this watching!

(Enter PRINCE WILLIAM.)

WILLIAM. Madam, how fares the king?

QUEEN. But ill, my lord,

For such a fever hath o'ermastered him

As leaves him little rest, since e'en in sleep

He tosses this way that way, with his hands

Clutches as 'twere a sword, and shouts aloud

"To arms! To arms!"

WILLIAM. Hath he no reasoning moments?

QUEEN. Nay! When he wakes his mind is so bewrought

With antic frenzy, that he thinks himself  
One while at sea, or at another cries  
For Becket or some other.

WILLIAM. Is this so?—

(*Aside*) Out of this sickness chance may give occasion  
To aid our purpose.

QUEEN. The leeches say  
That of this sleep is born some partial hope,  
Since it is calmer, deeper than before,  
That he may gain his reason at his waking.

WILLIAM. For you I most do wish it, patient lady;  
To follow through the watches of the night  
The drivellings of delirium, is more dread  
Than aught we soldiers suffer in the field.

QUEEN. I?—Dost thou think I watch the livelong night,  
And see the sad gray streaks of early dawn  
Gleam through the casement?—Nay! Not I, my lord!  
I have not strength, I am too frail a thing  
So to imperil life.

WILLIAM (*aside*). Yet till the morn  
Will feast admiring eyes or lead the dance,  
And weary never, though the youngest pale.

QUEEN. I have no grace to hold a sick man's cup,  
To smoothe his pillow, give him sigh for sigh,  
With "There! There! Rest thee!" Pshaw! another  
Burns in my veins than finds such labour sweet. [blood

WILLIAM. Madam, hast heard the news?

QUEEN. Not I—Speak on!  
Of whom?

WILLIAM. Of Becket.

QUEEN. He! I thought him gone.

WILLIAM. Aye! Gone he is, but being gone is grown  
More insolent than being here he dared.

QUEEN. As that be possible.

WILLIAM. Aye! Here he spoke  
Treason indeed, but only yet in bud;  
In England now his words have blossomed, fruited,  
To red-ripe villainy.

QUEEN. How hast thou heard?



WILLIAM. Robert de Broc is here, Sir Ranulph's brother,

QUEEN. Is here?—His brother?—Call him quick to me!

(Exit WILLIAM.)

QUEEN. Something of fate is here: I know not how,

But sure I am that of this present news

Will grow some further wonder: Comes there not

As 'twere a message sometimes to the mind,

To note beginnings ere we guess their ends.

(Enter WILLIAM, ROBERT DE BROC, LE BRETON, TRACY and FITZURSE.)

WILLIAM. Here is the gentleman will tell you all.

ROBERT. Madam, a letter——

QUEEN. From de Broc?—And thou?—

Art wounded?

ROBERT. Aye! My brother too is hurt.

QUEEN. Stay! Let me read! (Reads letter.)

What's this?—A villainous plot

To raise all London 'gainst the royal power,

To seize the younger king, to levy war?

Treason, my lords! All this shall to the king!

WILLIAM. Ah! as I wished.

QUEEN (aside). And Ranulph wounded.—Sir!

Art thou much hurt?—Thy brother?

ROBERT. As we stood

Together, back to back, the raging crowd

Pressed on us hardly, but we drove them off,——

QUEEN. Sir Ranulph?

ROBERT. Suffers much:—Is like to die.

QUEEN. To die!—Be silent, heart!—My lords, I pray

Your wisest counsel.

WILLIAM. Madam, were't not well

The king should learn this last of Becket's doings.

QUEEN. Becket!—'twas he?

ROBERT. My brother wrote it not?

QUEEN. I had not read. (aside) I sought for other words.

WILLIAM. I know not, lady, if thy deep affection

May favour Becket,

QUEEN. I! Affection? Favour?

Standing so near the throne, my lord, can I

Befriend his treason ?

WILLIAM. Madam, as you say :  
But I and these my friends have private cause,  
Beyond the duty which we owe the king,  
To wish that Becket may——

QUEEN. Well !

WILLIAM. Sin no more.

QUEEN. Oh craven thought which dare not live in speech !  
Learn courage of a woman ! He shall die !

WILLIAM. Much as I said, and so shall sin no more.  
Now, madam, can your woman's wit devise  
The how, the when ?

QUEEN. My lord, I have no hand  
To do such deed ; a little thrust of mine  
With all good will were impotent, but thou ?—  
Or thou ? *(They shake their heads.)*

I would I were a man to show  
How much a man may venture !

WILLIAM. By your grace,  
These men fear nothing,—nothing but the law.

QUEEN *(aside)*. Repute then lies.

WILLIAM. 'Tis wiser to speak out :  
Here are the hands, the will, aye ! e'en the weapons,  
But, like a ship on stocks, the enterpize,  
Is balanced on the edge of pro and con,  
Lacks just a little push to slide it off.

QUEEN. I have no fear : be't mine to launch your bark !  
*(They shake their heads.)*

Is't not enough ? What then ?

ALL. The king.

QUEEN. The king ?

Ha !—Will it serve ?—I have the plan, my lord.

WILLIAM. Said I not always, women are the first  
To find the germ of action, urging it  
From thought to purpose, thence to full achievement.

QUEEN. I have a plan :—I know not :—It may fail,  
But well-attempted hath much promise in't.  
Wait here awhile !—But I will to the king,  
And with some artifice of tears and cries

Will at his waking greet him.

WILLIAM.

Will not this

Recall the fever?

QUEEN.

Aye! His throbbing brain,

Half-dazed by stupor, yet shall poorly judge  
Whither my purpose tends; then come ye in,  
Sir Robert with you!—tell him all the tale,  
With what embellishment your fancy lends,  
And, e'er the sequence of his reason comes,  
His hot-brained haste of anger—

WILLIAM.

Excellent!

QUEEN. Will sweep away restraint and burst all bounds;

So, as a mountain torrent overfull  
Tears rocks and trees unheeding in its course,  
Shall from his puissant place and high estate  
Beat Becket to his level.

WILLIAM.

Lower yet,

Or steel has lost it's edge.

QUEEN.

The rest to you!

Fail not in yours, as mine I'll surely do.

*(Exit QUEEN into chamber.)*

WILLIAM. Save that it is belied in holy writ

(As churchmen read it) from experience  
And somewhat strange adventures, I'd dare swear  
Satan a woman: Naught so devilish,  
(And I'm not innocent,) ere brewed itself  
(*Touching his head*) Within this teeming nest of curious  
As that this woman fashions.—Gentlemen! [whims,  
Ha! What is that?

KING (*within*).

Treason! A sword! A sword!

WILLIAM. The philtre works.

KING (*within*).

Have at ye traitors all!

WILLIAM. Pass we within! One moment! Listen, sirs,

Are we not sworn that at the king's command  
We do his will?—When thus I move my hand,  
And at the least occasion I will move it,  
Be sure that the king himself has said so much  
As well may serve our purpose: Then to horse!  
Ride for your lives! And e'er a change can be,

Make of that purpose fact!

QUEEN (*within*).

My lords! My lords!

(*Exeunt omnes into King's chamber.*)

END OF SCENE II.—ACT IV.

## ACT IV.

SCENE III.—*The king's chamber.*

(The KING seated, his dress disordered, with a sword in his hand—  
The QUEEN—DE MORVILLE supporting the KING. Enter  
LEICESTER, CORNWALL, and Lords by another door—a leech with  
the KING. LEICESTER tries to take the sword from the KING.)

DE MORVILLE. My lord, 'twere best to leave it, lest the king  
Wake to new fury.

LEICESTER. Aye! but he may wound  
Someone who loves him.

DE MORVILLE. Nay! He is not mad,  
But only for the time miswrought by fear;  
And at his waking may perchance be sound.

LEICESTER. God grant it be so!

QUEEN. But now, like one possessed,  
He raging strode about the chamber's space,  
Hither and thither striking with the edge,  
As though he swept amid the armed battle,  
Hard pressed by foemen.

LEECH. 'Tis but in the course  
Of such distempers, that the heated brain  
Should picture wonders to the eyes aghast  
At that we cannot see, which is to him  
As though he saw it.

KING. Is de Morville here?

DE MORVILLE. Here! At thy side, my liege.

- LEECH. The king is saved !  
 Something, we know not what, e'en we who trace  
 The wonder workings of life's mystery,  
 Has loosed his brain : My lord, canst thou sit up ?
- KING. Aye, at an effort's cost ! Ah, Leicester, welcome !  
 And Cornwall here : My lords, I thank you all !  
 I have been somewhat ailing as it seems ;  
 Is it not so, my queen ?
- QUEEN. My lord, we feared the worst,  
 The very worst.
- KING. There is no worst ; the king  
 Dies not, but is translated. Were I gone  
 Henry the Second found his natural heir  
 In the third Henry.
- WILLIAM. It might be so, my lord.
- KING. It might !—God's death, how might ? It should be so !  
 Is any traitor here ?
- WILLIAM. None here, my liege.
- KING. Or elsewhere in my realm ?
- WILLIAM. I cannot say.
- KING. What mean these riddles ?—Speak outright, my lord !
- WILLIAM. I have no certain knowledge ; I but speak  
 By hearsay and report of one who saw.
- KING. Of one who saw ? My lord, what saw he ?—Tush !  
 Eye-witnesses would crowd the world for gold.
- WILLIAM. No gold, my lord, has this received, but wounds !
- KING. Wounds !—Give me grace !—Dare any strike a man,  
 And I not know it ?
- LEICESTER. Pardon me, my liege !  
 Something I heard of this, but in despite  
 Of mine own will, spake not of it to thee.
- KING. But that I know thee faithful in the least  
 As in the greatest matters, I were fain  
 To chide thee, Leicester.
- LEICESTER. As I came, my liege,  
 Hot-foot with news, the leech entreated me,  
 Adjured me by the oath of my allegiance,  
 To give thee rest, to spare thy weary brain  
 The test of passion.

KING.                                      Passion ?

LEECH.                                      Aye, my liege !

'Twere wiser, if Sir William will, to pass  
This question, may be trifling to the state,  
Which in thy present health perchance shall breed  
Such fermentation in thy——

KING.                                      Silence, sir !

A king hath ever health, can give no space  
For cautious thought of this may ease his ill,  
Or that redouble.—He who wears a crown  
Hath eyes for all, and ears, and hands to strike,  
And eyes, ears, hands, have never ease or rest,  
Until men say of him “God rest his soul !”  
Speak on, Sir William !

WILLIAM.                                      Rather hear, my lord,  
His tale who seeing suffered :—He is here,  
Robert de Broc.

KING.                                      I know thee not : Hast thou  
A brother, Ranulph ?

ROBERT.                                      Aye, my gracious liege.

KING. Enough ! I know him : Speak !

ROBERT.                                      I pray my lord  
To read this letter, writ by one he loves,  
Sir Joceline——

KING.                                      Arundel ?

ROBERT.                                      None else, my liege.      (*Gives letter.*)

KING (*reading*). Young Henry—Winchester—The citizens  
Of London—Southwark—was it there ?

ROBERT.                                      It was !

KING. Ha ! Becket !—Strange it is, in ev'ry phrase,  
Whether I hear or read, that name doth meet me !  
How many years hath “Becket,” hour by hour,  
Haunted my dreams by night, my thoughts by day,  
Until at last 'tis grown as dread to me,  
As is some black hobgoblin to a child,  
Who learns from fear obedience :—What the news  
Which came to thee, my lord ?

LEICESTER.                                      My liege, 'twas writ,  
That Becket, in despite of admonition,

Aye! e'en of orders, had in arméd state  
 Marched in procession unto Southwark, there  
 Was well received by many citizens,  
 Some of renown,; that, being bid disperse,  
 The mob stood fast, opposing clubs to swords,——

WILLIAM. Whereat this gentleman was wounded, sire,  
 His brother killed, or very sorely hurt.

KING. 'Twere well to probe this wound:—How say you, sir;  
 That Becket stirred the people?

ROBERT. Aye, my liege.

With very bitter words.

WILLIAM (*aside to ROBERT*). Against the king.

ROBERT. Against the king.

KING. And thou, who tellest this,  
 What, who art thou?

ROBERT. A gentleman.

KING. By what?—  
 Birth or thine own begetting?—Hast no words?—  
 What wert thou ere thou grewest gentleman?  
 Speak, sirrah, speak!

ROBERT. I once have been a priest.

KING. And wert disfrooked; I guessed it: Brother mine,  
 I'd warn thee choose a fitter messenger:  
 Is such as this to give account to kings  
 Of that archbishops do?—Out, out, thou cur!  
 This quarry is too high for such as thou.

LEICESTER. But Joceline's letter——

KING. Joceline meaneth well;  
 But hath an eye, which, like this cunning glass,  
 Distorts, enlarges, till the veriest nit  
 Soars like a dragon.

WILLIAM. Of your grace, my lord,  
 There is yet more.

KING. Of him? I'll hear it not!  
 Thy friend hath evil favour, and his face  
 Belies him strangely if he be not vile.  
 Go! Get him forth, I care not how: By whip,  
 If words shall fail! (*Exit ROBERT.*)

WILLIAM (*to QUEEN*). By misadventure, madam,

Our bark is stranded.

QUEEN. Let me take the helm :  
Stand thou to aid me !—By your leave, my lord,  
This Becket hath in many things done ill ;  
For openly, we hear, he hath refused  
To swear allegiance.

KING. When ?

QUEEN. As first he landed.

KING. Nothing I heard of this.

QUEEN. My lord was sick,  
And bitter news is ever sickness' bane.

KING. Thou art his foe.

QUEEN. My lord, I am thy queen,  
And by my duty am no friend to any  
Who loves thee, serves thee not.

KING. Great thanks indeed  
Are due for such good news.—Say on, my queen !

QUEEN. Becket with evil mind and base intent  
Hath of a surety, oft, in divers places,  
Spoken disdainfully of thee and thine.

KING. Of thee ?

QUEEN. Of me and others.—Lift his voice  
Against the so-called luxury and pomp  
Which decks my court, and styled it, as I hear,  
A devil's den.

KING. He hath some right to speak ;  
He, who by daily sacrifice of self,  
Hath so uplift himself o'er all the world,  
That what we others misname purity,  
Is stained to him.

QUEEN. To him, my lord !—To him ?  
It is not meet I tell you :—Ask of these  
What life is that of Becket.

WILLIAM. Here, my lord,  
I may not speak of such, but all men know  
With what constrained hypocrisy he turns  
His better side without.

KING. Enough of this !  
I weary of the man.—Give me to drink !



A sudden faintness——

LEECH. Pray you, go, my lords!

His highness tires.

(*Exeunt omnes except KING, LEECH, and DE MORVILLE.*)

KING. The very name of Becket

Is used by all, as 'twere a public goad

To prick my haste: Has any ought to ask,

He thinks to recommend his urgent purpose

By some sly word of Becket.—Could they know

How my gorge rises at the sound of it,

Whether 'tis Becket blest, or Becket damned,

They would avoid it, as a mortal sin,

And then perchance were rest.

(*All rush in.*)

LEICESTER. My liege! My liege!

A wondrous, terrible, and sadd'ning sight

Creeps to your presence! Comes my lord of York

With two his brethren bishops swathed in sables,

As though accursed by God and shunned by man.

KING. Is this from Becket's hand?

LEICESTER. It is my liege.

KING. I knew it well! Beshrew me, as it seems,

The sun shines Becket, and the angry wind

Howls Becket's name amid the battlements,

Until the very air we others breathe

Is Becket's only.

LEECH. By your grace, my lord,

Dismiss this question.

KING. Sir, I am a leech,

Even as thou art,—more—'tis thine to watch

O'er one poor body, mine it is to guard

A kingdom's health: I'm strong indeed,

Since as it seems this news hath physic in't,

Or poison irritant. Go, call the bishops!

(*Enter YORK, LONDON, and SALISBURY.*)

My lords! In truth, I dare not call you welcome:

That you must speak, speak out!

YORK. My lord the king!

I only of the three can ope my lips;

These others, London he, and Salisbury  
 The second penitent, are interdicted  
 From fire and water, excommunicate,  
 And none for fear of like infliction dare  
 Receive them, touch them, or have speech with them.

KING. I know the lips have cursed you : Ne'er again  
 Shall my lips meet them.—Becket is the man !

YORK. My lord, with all respect I speak of him,  
 Since he with unrestrained and open licence  
 Doth of the realm possess the secular arm :  
 My lord of Canterbury, with full title,  
 (For less I dare not call him,) did this act.

KING. Am I not king ?—Dare any save myself  
 Give audience, judge, condemn ?—Here is indeed  
 A pestilent priest !

YORK. Ungrateful for the past.  
 My lord the primate, of thy royal mercy  
 Alas ! unmindful, hath such sentence laid  
 On all who by thine order were concerned  
 In that, so-called, unholy festival  
 Which crowned Lord Henry king :

These hath he judged——

KING. By every saint in Christendom I swear,  
 That judgment is reversed !—Am I to stand  
 As 'twere an usher in the royal court,  
 To hear the verdict when the cause is done ?

YORK. Nay ! Said I judged ?—Tis more : He has condemned.  
 So much my duty to the Church commands  
 I tell my lord, but loyalty yet more :  
 For Canterbury moves with arméd strength  
 Through all the length and breadth of England's isle,  
 Seizing a castle here, a fortress there :  
 That so, encircled by their solid fence,  
 He may in future smile at thy displeasure,  
 Opposing to thy wrath their battlements.

KING. Now, by the eyes of God, 'twas he himself,  
 The arch—arch-devil, who the first advised  
 To hold all castles in the royal hand,  
 Lest, as he said, stone walls make stubborn hearts.

No stone so hard is quarried from the earth,  
 As shall avail to shield his treachery !  
 But ye, my lords, to your great detriment,  
 Have suffered much for me : I thank you much.

YORK. We, gracious king, fear not to suffer ill,  
 So we but serve thy cause : yet in good truth,  
 A very evil day has dawned on us,  
 And peering through the future, we espy  
 Clouds and thick darkness only.—He who rules  
 England and England's Church——

KING. 'Fore God, my lord,  
 Peace, or my heart will burst ! "Who rules," indeed !  
 As I do live, this head, is now so high,  
 Shall bow, shall cringe, for mercy at my feet !  
 I am with you, my lord ! If any flinch,  
 Or fail his uttermost against this man,  
 He is a traitor.

WILLIAM. Traitor he the first,  
 Who thus makes traitors.

QUEEN. Traitor to my son,  
 As unto thee, my lord, since he has dared  
 By blasphemous contention to annul,  
 And would reverse, the sacred blessing giv'n  
 To Henry at his crowning.

KING. When was man  
 So sore beset ? Is there no rest, no peace ?

WILLIAM. What peace is possible while Becket lives ?

YORK. My lord, I pray thee, for this condemnation  
 Make no reprisal !—That which is we bear——

KING. Bear ! By God's eyes ! Ye bear it as ye choose !  
 But not so I !—Is any doomed to ill  
 Concerning Henry's crown, I am the first :  
 And I will be among you, cursed or blessed !

YORK. I do beseech thee, patience ! All may mend.  
 This is an evil hour, but we may learn  
 From patience later wisdom : let it pass,  
 Till outraged Heaven toll this upstart's knell !

KING. What shall I do, my lord ? What wouldst thou have ?  
 Am I to sit, and watch my dignity

Shrivel before the fire of Becket's pride  
To ashes light as air?

YORK. 'Tis not for me  
To proffer counsel: of my heart I pray,  
Beseech thee, patience! These great lords and earls  
Must of their duty point thy forward course.

KING. Speak, Leicester.

LEICESTER. Dear my lord, of olden time  
Have I befriended Becket, but be sure,  
That since he fled the kingdom and thy favour,  
We have no fellowship or confidence,  
But are divided ever.

WILLIAM. As I heard  
In passing Rome, a Pope, the head of the Church,  
For his ungodly pride and insolence,  
Was of the Emp'ror slain.

LONDON. Oh king! My lord!  
Hear not such evil words! In such a cause  
The very dumb find voice: Oh! put away  
This dread temptation!

QUEEN. Henry, art thou king:  
Or must we go to Paris, should we seek  
A royal hand to rule?

KING. Oh! give me peace!  
I am distraught with all this noisy strife:  
Others may rest a fevered aching head,  
But I!—Never!

QUEEN. Never! while Becket breathes!  
Becket hath torn down thy tranquillity  
To deck his royal state.

KING. By Heaven! Royal!  
He, who first crept into my court a beggar,  
Lame horse and ragged rider, now may dare  
Deride me, swaggers on my throne; the thrall,  
Who durst not when he came have kissed my foot!  
And ye——

LEICESTER. My lord, we serve thee with all zeal.

KING. Your zeal!—A rag!—When I am swept aside  
By this bold hustling churchman, who derides

My favour, tramples down my total realm,  
And to my face dishonours me—

LEICESTER. My lord !

I pray thee, patience !

KING. Patience ! 'Tis for you

To wish me patient, you who see me burn  
And freeze yourselves :—I made you all you are,  
And yet not one will aid me !—Gentle sirs !  
If patience must be learnt, ye are my school.

LEICESTER. My lord, we suffer with thee.

KING. Thankless cowards !

God's death, I suffocate !—Of all of you,—  
Ye varlets, curse you !—Ye who eat my bread,  
Who serve me in your words ; is there not one  
Will strike a blow to free me ?—Water ! Water !

(*The KING faints. WILLIAM makes a sign and the knights  
pass out. Exeunt WILLIAM and QUEEN.*)

KING (*recovering*). De Morville !

LEICESTER. Is gone, my lord.

KING. Gone ! Where ?

LEICESTER. I know not.

KING. Go thou quick, recall him here !  
(*Exit an Usher.*)

Upraise me, Leicester—so—My lords, the strength  
Which hath of old sustained me, is become  
Frail as a gossamer :—but in despite  
Of this accurséd fever, I must speak,  
And you shall act.

LEICESTER. As shall your Highness please.

KING. This Becket hath, ye hear, within my realm  
Usurped a tyrannous sway, has dared suspend  
And excommunicate these holy men,  
Has threatened e'en my son ; as Legate, holds  
New power from the Pope, new privilege  
For fresh extortion :—Tell them, Leicester !—Ah !  
Let me lie down !

LEICESTER. My lords, the king demands  
Your counsel in this crisis :—As for me,  
I do advise that some at once be sent

In the king's name to curb this restless spirit.

CORNWALL. Nay! Such as he are only good to hang!

Give me the order, or but give me leave,

And this new year shall bring new peace to us.

KING. Tush, Cornwall;—Thou dost speak as of a dog:

This is no common soul, who being gone,

The world is unaware that he has been:

I would not harm the man, but bridle him

To mine own purpose.

LEICESTER.

It were well, my liege,

To send some messenger, a trusty man,

Such as de Mandeville, to speak with Becket,

If he hear reason.

KING.

Aye! So let it be;

De Morville with him.

(*Enter Usher.*)

USHER.

He is gone, my liege!

KING. Gone! How?—When?—Where?

USHER.

To England: As I passed

Into the castle yard he spurred his horse

Across the drawbridge, shouting as he rode,

“Death to all traitors! God preserve the king!”

KING. De Morville gone!

USHER.

And not alone, my lord:

William de Tracy, Reginald Fitzurse,

And Breton Robert, as the warder saith,

Are on their separate ways departed all,

Within the hour.

KING.

What may this mean, my lord?

LEICESTER. Save Hugh de Morville, these are desp'rate men,

Swift to shed blood; and this so sudden going

Savours to me of murder.

KING.

Murder! How?

LEICESTER. In such impatient words as 'scaped thy lips,

Have they their warrant.

KING.

What?—Thou thinkest then

Danger in this to Becket?

LEICESTER.

Aye! as surely

As doth a whistling arrow in the air

Betoken death to him on whom it falls.

KING. To horse at once! I ride with you!

LEECH. My lord!

KING. I had forgot! I cannot; but my spirit  
 Shall make you laggards! Fly to England, sirs!  
 Five hundred marks to him who first shall cross  
 The curséd channel!—Spare nor horse nor gold!  
 Lay me the knaves in prison! Here's your warrant!  
 Take this! and this!— (*Giving signet.*)

All men in England know them;  
 Ride for your lives! My life is on your speed!  
 (*Exeunt Lords, except LEICESTER.*)

Is this indeed the end?—I loved the man!  
 And, by the eyes of God, I love him still!  
 The little ill he did me is forgotten:  
 Oh! Save him! Save him!

Becket, pardon me!  
 It was not in my heart!

Ye saints, protect him!  
 I danced upon his knee:—I kissed his lips:—  
 E'en as a boy, my lord!—I could not kill him!  
 It is not true!

Oh! God in Heav'n, take all,  
 My crown, my life, but save him!

What?—Who spoke?  
 No answer! Nothing!

Must it be my fate  
 Always to do the right too late! Too late!  
 (*Swoons.*)

END OF ACT IV.

## ACT V.

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SCENE I. (A. D. 1170).—*Room in Saltwood Castle.*

(Enter ROBERT DE BROC in riding dress.)

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ROBERT. Quick! Bring me wine! And thou, go tell my  
That I am come!—Give me that cushion, sir! [brother  
I think there never was so rough a road  
As that from Sandwich: never, I will swear,  
Rode one so weary on it. (Enter RANULPH.)

RANULPH. Robert! Here!

ROBERT. Aye! With good news.

RANULPH. Such news of late is rare.

ROBERT. Now, as I look at thee, I see thy face,  
Most like a withered pear, is crabbed and lined,  
As though the devil himself had pinched it up.

RANULPH. As well the devil: Becket hath resumed  
From Henry's hands the lordship of this castle,  
And we, like fledgling sparrows, from our nest  
Are by this cuckoo driv'n.

ROBERT. Ha! Ha!

RANULPH. And more;

Anent an error of some lads of mine,  
Who drank a little wine which Becket prized,  
And being chided, all unused to words,  
Gave blows in answer, he must needs proclaim  
Myself in Church as curséd.

ROBERT. Say you so?  
Then prithee, brother mine, sit farther off,  
Lest the contagion pass.



RANULPH. No fear for thee :  
 For both of us, if Becket's word have pow'r,  
 Are duly sent with book and bell and candle  
 To deep damnation.

ROBERT. Then, if I am damned,  
 I'll do the devil's work !—Cheer up, my brother,  
 There is an end to this !—The king hath charged  
 Some four of us to right the earlier wrong  
 Anent the bishops. *(Enter DE TRACY.)*

Welcome here, de Tracy !

DE TRACY. Where are the others ?

ROBERT. Hast not seen them ?

DE TRACY. Nay !

Not since we parted in the castle yard,  
 To find each one his single road to Saltwood.

ROBERT. E'en if they come not we are hands enough  
 To do the deed.

RANULPH. What deed ?

ROBERT. To silence Becket.

RANULPH. What ? Murder ?

ROBERT. Murder ! Tush ! Call you that  
 Which is the secret justice of the king ? [murder,  
 But hist ! here comes another. *(Enter DE MORVILLE.)*

DE TRACY. Greet him well !

He bears as 'twere to us the royal signet,  
 That patent mark that we in Henry's name  
 Do that we do. God save thee, sir !

DE MORVILLE. And thee !

RANULPH. Here's wine, my lord !

DE MORVILLE. I thank thee.

ROBERT. Here we be,  
 Four stalwart men : what if the others fail !

DE TRACY. Are we enough ? Becket hath armed strength,  
 Sufficient as 'twas said to move the realm ;  
 We have but few.

RANULPH. He fewer, as I know :  
 Five knights alone were with him at the first,  
 These hath he now dismissed.

DE MORVILLE. 'Twas told the king

He had an army.

ROBERT. Cowled :—of monks, my lord.

DE MORVILLE. What ! Then——

ROBERT. We lied ! and if we lied, what  
It served a noble purpose, and the king [then ?  
Was willingly deceived. (*Enter FITZURSE.*)

Another comes :

All hail, Fitzurse ! Our tale will soon be full.

DE MORVILLE. 'Tis the king's will, therein must lie my faith !  
Yet am I loath in such companionship  
To set the battle forward : but that I know,  
From the king's lips, this fellow Becket traitor,  
I would not soil my knighthood with such knaves.

FITZURSE (*aside*). Best have a care ! De Morville looks askance :  
We cannot spare him, since he serves us all  
As some certificate of honour.—Sirs !  
Let us discuss this matter. (*Enter LE BRETON.*)

LE BRETON. Gentlemen !  
Good even all ! Am I the last to come ?  
Yet pressed I onward with a bloody spur.

FITZURSE. The last, but not too late. Let us decide  
Tomorrow's work !—De Morville, of us all  
Thou hast precedence by thy name and rank.

DE MORVILLE. I council nothing : that my lord the king  
Doth of his prudence will, is mine to do :  
I am among you, 'tis enough ! (*aside*) For me  
Too much by far !

ROBERT. Hear, gentles, all of you !  
This is a pretty songster !

FITZURSE. Silence, sir !  
Or at thy peril speak !—If so, my lord,  
I will adventure all to serve the cause :  
Will you that in this matter I be chief ?

ALL. Yes ! Yes ! Fitzurse !

FITZURSE. Then thus my counsel runs :  
Let us to-morrow at the earliest dawn,  
Demand in Henry's name from all the shire  
Their utmost aid ;—so armed and so escorted,  
Let us to Becket's palace ; meet him there,

Confront him face to face ; if he shall yield  
That the king ask, 'tis well : If not——

ROBERT.

If not !

'Fore God ! If not, my lords !—I wear a blade  
Shall teach—shall teach——A cock that will not crow,  
Must lose his spurs ! Good lack ! a silly thing !  
A cock and crows not. (*To DE MORVILLE.*)

DE MORVILLE.

Out, thou drunken hound !

Keep a clean tongue ! (*Strikes him.*)

FITZURSE

Well served !

DE MORVILLE.

Are we come here

To listen to the ravings of a sot ?

To me this reeks too much of secret murder,  
Planned in a nest of cut-throats such as he.

ALL. Cut-throats !

FITZURSE.

I pray you patience all ! My lord,

This is no murder, least of all is secret :

For openly we meet my lord archbishop,

And openly we pray him that he yield

Obedience to the king : If he be then

Stiffnecked and obstinate, we lay the man

In some safe custody till comes the king.

DE MORVILLE. So far am I with you.

FITZURSE (*aside.*)

So far must we,

We, who would farther go, pretend to bow

Before the stubborn humour of this knight.

LE BRETON. What will Lord William say if he escape ?

FITZURSE. Escape ! He cannot ! Some too petulant word,

Some blow too hasty, needs must bring the end :

And then de Morville, in that he consents

Unto this first, hath in the last a share.

DE MORVILLE. Oh, thou good sword ! which served my father

Sleep thou within thy scabbard, lest a stain, [well,

Begotten in such revels, cling to thee

Closer than rust, and curse thee with my name !

ROBERT. A cock !—and crows not !

(*DE MORVILLE rushes at him.*)

LE BRETON.

Sir !—The man is drunk !

DE MORVILLE. Drunk or bedeviled ! Give me way to him !

*(All rise and half draw their swords against DE MORVILLE.*

*FITZURSE steps between them).*

FITZURSE. Put up your swords! We serve the king to-day,  
And may not draw a blade in other quarrel.  
Rise we betimes, my lords; and ride around  
Throughout the country, calling to our aid  
Ev'ry king's man! Part we in friendship, sirs!  
Since that is done by one is done by all.

*(Exeunt all except DE MORVILLE.)*

DE MORVILLE. In friendship! I!—with these? As well to  
Me claim a cousinship or closer kin, [bid  
With ev'ry gallows knave who slits a throat,  
And swaggers all besworded, with the air  
Of one has conquered kingdoms! And this scum,  
This vilest refuse of the lower court,  
Hath of a right companionship with me,  
Since all are sworn to do the royal will;  
Who serves a king must oft serve honour ill.

END OF SCENE I.—ACT V.

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## ACT V.

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SCENE II.—*Becket's Chamber—The Palace, Canterbury.*

(BECKET seated,—near him HERBERT DE BOSHAM and two others.)

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BECKET. Therefore go ye unto the king of France,  
And bear him many greetings, bid him know  
That in all things it is not well with me,  
But is not worse: Unto my lord of Sens  
Carry this packet; tell my lord from me  
All that I have disclosed: This to the Pope

Anent the bishops.—Fare you well, my sons !

HERBERT. Oh, father, let me stay beside thee here !

I cannot go in fear.

BECKET. Fear not, my son :

He who has placed me here can guard me here !

Herbert ! My friend ! If it should chance that never,

Never in all thy life, we meet again,

Remember this ; I love thee as myself,

More than myself do trust thee. Go now ! Go !

HERBERT. Farewell, my lord ! My words are dumb : my heart

Beats in such broken measure that my breath

Fails me to speak : Farewell, my lord !

BECKET. Farewell !

*(Exeunt HERBERT and others.)*

BECKET. There goes the truest heart in Christendom,

Set to one purpose, fixed from any wind

Of fashion or advantage ! Life hath been

But evil, yet in evil there is good,

Seeing such friendship lives in man for man :

To know a real friend in this sad world

Is like a spring of water in the desert,

And gives a beauty to the barren waste,

Which it by nature has not. *(A knock heard.)*

Who is there ?

*(Enter ROSAMOND.)*

BECKET. What ?—Rosamond ?

ROSAMOND. Nay ! Sister Magdalen :

The other is forgotten.

BECKET. Whence art thou ?

From Godstowe ?

ROSAMOND. Nay, my lord ! But I am come

To speak not of myself.—There's danger here !

BECKET. Danger ? For whom ?

ROSAMOND. For thee, my lord ! In haste

I came to warn thee.

BECKET. 'Tis too late, my daughter.

ROSAMOND. Nay, not too late !—As through the crowded

Which yesterday were silent, I have passed, [streets,

Fierce bearded men were swarming to and fro,

And summoned ev'ry soldier to his arms.

BECKET. These are but threats, my daughter.

ROSAMOND. Hear me out!

Here have they fixed their rendezvous.

BECKET. What? Here?

ROSAMOND. Here! At the palace!—Since the citizens

Delayed to arm, is made a proclamation

In the king's name, that none, upon his peril,

Presume to stir or move from out his house,

Whate'er may happen.

BECKET. Who are these, who thus

Dare to disturb the city?

ROSAMOND. The de Brocs

Alone I know, but others are with them;

A score or so of evil-visaged men.

BECKETS. All soldiers to a nun are evil-visaged,

As unto children ev'ry man's a giant.

ROSAMOND. My lord, thou bid'st me to my shame remind,

I was not always thus:—Mine eyes have seen

Good men, brave men, and villains—most of these.

I am no girl to frighten with a feather.

BECKET. I am no monk, to shiver at a sword;

Let these men come, if 'tis with me their pleasure.

ROSAMOND. It is with thee!—Amid the blasphemy [words

Which should have scorched their tongues, I heard the

“Archbishop!—Becket!—Death!—The king's command;”

And one of Canterbury, as I came,

Told me that some from France had journeyed hither

To do thee evil.

BECKET. That shall be, shall be!

I will not move a finger to preserve

My weary life.

ROSAMOND. For us, who love you, fly!

BECKET. Has he, is placed to guard a perilous post,

No love that longs for him, no home that wails

To bid him welcome—yet, should he draw back,

How would men name him?

ROSAMOND. Father, hear me out!

A thousand men may die and no one know;

But thou, should evil come to thee, art lost  
To Christendom, to England, to the Church.

BECKET. We, while we live, o'ervalue overmuch  
Our little worth: No man has ever breathed,  
But, being gone, unlikely though it seemed,  
He is replaced ere he is well forgotten.  
The world has scanty time to choose its leaders,  
It takes them as they are.

ROSAMOND. My lord! My father!  
Nothing I know of this: But these, thy flock,  
How wilt thou leave them!

BECKET. I will never leave them!

ROSAMOND. But if these kill thee?

BECKET. Then am I to all  
A more enduring ensign; since my death  
Shall shew them, than a century of life,  
More faith, more hope, more confidence in good.

ROSAMOND. Thou wilt not fly?

BECKET. I will not!

ROSAMOND. Father dear!

By all the memories of bygone years;  
By all the love of little Rosamond  
Who prattled on thy knee; by that respect,  
More high, more deep than love, which bade me know  
How mighty, how stupendous among men  
Thy greatness towered; by thy goodness past;  
By thine exceeding tenderness to me,—  
To me, the sinner; by the hope has blossomed  
Within my heart by thee; oh, father, father!  
Fly, ere it be too late!

BECKET. My most dear daughter!  
Nay! Weep not! Weep not! Lest I weep with thee!  
My hour is come:—I know it:—I am ready.

ROSAMOND. Thou wilt not fly?—At least give blow for blow;  
Summon thy household, arm thy bravest knights,  
Set sword to sword!

BECKET. I am no soldier now.  
My life hath not for me so great a charm  
That I would buy it by another's death;





And I, who lonely climbed this giddy height,  
Alone must face the darkness of the night.

(*A knock heard*) Come in !

(*Enter GRIMM, ABBOT OF ST. ALBANS, JOHN OF SALISBURY,  
Clerks, Monks, &c., and FITZNIGEL.*)

GRIMM. My lord, it is the wonted hour,  
When we converse with thee.

BECKET (*aside.*) Then tears, go by !

What captain falters, as he scales the breach  
Above the foremost soldier ?—Ah ! St. Albans !  
'Tis a good wind that brings thee.

ST. ALBANS. Nay, my lord !

'Twas a good horse.

BECKET. Perchance he had good wind.

GRIMM. I joy, my lord, to hear thee speak so well ;  
As heartily, as cheerfully, as ever.

BECKET. My son, a man who goeth to his Master,  
Hath a good right to gladness.

FITZNIGEL. Dear my lord !

I have a present offer from the king  
'To give me service : 'Tis to my advantage ;  
And of thy grace I pray thee, yield consent  
That I may quit thee.

BECKET. Go, if so thou wilt !

Unwilling service hath all evil in't.

FITZNIGEL. Unwilling !—Nay, my lord !

BECKET. Ungracious then !

A place unvalued is a place ill filled.

FITZNIGEL. I am not all ungrateful, good my lord.

BECKET. Ungrateful !—Said I so ?—Thy mouth condemns,  
As doth thy conscience judge thee.—Go in peace !

(*Exit FITZNIGEL.*)

What is the hour ? Can I reach Sandwich yet  
Ere night.

GRIMM. With ease, my lord ; it is but four o' the clock.

BECKET. Nay ! as in all God's will be done in me !

Thomas will wait ; what God shall offer him,  
That will he meet here, in the Church he rules.

GRIMM. What mean'st thou, father ?

BECKET. Scarce I know, my son.

Yet, reading ere the dawn, of him who died,  
A martyr, my precursor in the see,  
Holy Saint Elphage, came there over me  
A sudden thought, perchance of heav'n, that soon  
His shrine might see another martyrdom.

GRIMM. My lord! Not so! The trouble is well ended.

BECKET. My friend, mistake me not! As of another  
I judge my case: The king is not content,  
And his dear son, my only hope on earth,  
Loves me no more.

GRIMM. How can this be, my lord?

BECKET. Well! Well enough!—I know, alas! too well  
Where tends this matter. Go thou, dear my son,  
And pray for me at home: I in my Church  
Will hold such feast as God provides for me.

(*Enter FITZNIGEL.*)

FITZNIGEL. There stand without, my lord, four noble knights  
Of the king's household, would have speech with thee.

BECKET. Let them come in.

(*Exit FITZNIGEL. As BECKET speaks, enter four knights  
and the DE BROCS, without swords, but with armour  
under their cloaks, who all seat themselves behind*

BECKET.)

(*To JOHN OF SALISBURY.*) At Wrotham is a priest,  
One William; he hath lately in a dream  
Been visited by saints, who bade him show,  
By such and certain signs, of privy  
To me alone, that many holy relics  
Were of a surety laid in such a place:  
This all was true; I charge thee, by thy love,  
See that this priest, a poor man and a humble,  
Receive his due in grant or benefice.

(*Turns and sees the knights.*)

God save you all! De Tracy, welcome here!

FITZURSE (*after a pause*). God help thee!

(*A long silence—FITZURSE continues.*)

We are come to thee to-day,  
As messengers from him who o'er the sea

Ruleth all England: Say! Is it thy will  
That we speak privately, or shall we tell  
Our embassy within the ears of all?

BECKET. 'Tis as ye will.

FITZURSE. Nay! Rather as thou wilt.

BECKET. I am all yours, my lord.

FITZURSE. 'Twere wiser then,  
That matters of such import be not classed  
With common gossip, on which hungry ears  
May batten at their pleasure.

BECKET (*to Clerks, etc.*) Go, my sons:  
Await my coming! Set the door ajar,  
That all may see.

(*Exeunt Clerks, etc. A long pause.*)

ROBERT (*to LE BRETON*). If thou art one with me,  
Here is the end.

LE BRETON. We have no arms.

ROBERT. No eyes!  
The crozier stands beside him; with a blow  
The king were king.

FITZURSE. The matter first at hand  
Is touching those, the bishop suffragans,  
Whom thou in thine o'erbearing hateful pride,  
Hast dared to curse: Thus speaks the king to thee;  
Absolve these men, or at thy peril——

BECKET. Stay!

These are not things to speak in privacy.

Recall my clerks! (*Enter Clerks, etc.*)

Now may you in this presence

Declare the royal will.

FITZURSE. If so thou choosest,  
These men and all the world may hear our message.  
My lord the king hath further umbrage ta'en,  
That thou to whom he lately gave forgiveness,  
Hast marched an arméd force in treas'nous guise  
Amongst his cities, raised unruly mobs  
Against the royal peace, and still refuseth  
T' affirm the crowning of the younger king.  
Betake thee then at once to Winchester,

And do thy duty to thy lord and ours.

BECKET. What shall I do?

FITZURSE. Thou shouldest of the right  
Be better judge than we.

BECKET. If I did know,  
I would not say I know not: I believe  
That in all things, as ever, I have done  
Mine utmost duty.

FITZURSE. Nay! By God, not so!  
Much hast thou left undone, yet more remains  
Ill done to be reversed.—The king commands  
That thou shalt hasten to the younger king,  
Abjure thy treason and amendment swear,  
And at his hands renew thy fealty.

BECKET. Where is my treason?—Why my fealty?

FITZURSE. Thomas, thou knowest well!—Do not we all  
Do homage for our holdings to the king?

BECKET. For that I hold I sure will do my duty;  
But will as surely never in my life  
Swear any oath again; for oaths breed curses  
Until the whole earth trembles.

FITZURSE. Now we know  
The measure of thy treason! Plainly, sir,  
The king doth in his wisdom straightly order  
That thou absolve the bishops.

BECKET. That I bind,  
That may I loose: But this is not of me.

FITZURSE. Of thee or not, through thee we know 'twas done.

BECKET. His Holiness, the Pope, hath of his wisdom  
Declared them curséd; I, I hide it not,  
Consent that thus my honour he defend:  
Yet from my love for them, not of my duty,  
I will absolve them, if they bow to him  
And own his judgment.

DE MORVILLE. Spake there ever man  
So proudly? Can'st thou dare, in his despite  
Who made thee all thou art, to parley thus?

BECKET. The king hath nothing made me! That he gave,  
As ye do tell me, now he takes away.

DE MORVILLE. And that is——

BECKET Full permission to redress,  
All that was done against me in the past,  
To judge these bishops for their vile offence,  
To sentence them——

FITZURSE. Thou liest in thy throat !  
What ! Will ye say that our most trusty king  
Hath dealt so treach'rously in this respect ;  
That those were present at Lord Henry's crowning  
Are by his leave to suffer, as they came  
At his command ? He never thought of it !  
How darest thou affirm such treachery,  
So foul, so unexampled, of the king ?

BECKET. I speak of nothing save of public note ;  
Our meeting, our forgiveness, was no secret :  
Archbishops, bishops, many noble lords,  
And thou thyself, Sir Reginald Fitzurse,  
Know all I say is true.

FITZURSE. I know it not !  
Nothing I knew, or heard of it ere now !

BECKET. Yet doth God know it : I am sure of thee,  
That thou wast there.

FITZURSE. I heard it not, by God !  
Must we, the king's liegemen, confute thy lies  
Against the royal honour ? Foul it is,  
And treasonous in act, to thus accuse  
The king of treason ! We no more can bear it,  
And, by God's wounds, we will not !

ALL We will not !

DE TRACY. This quarrel is too old, 'twere well it die !

GRIMM. My lord, I pray thee speak in privy !

BECKET. That can avail us nothing : What they ask  
I cannot, nay, I must not yield to any.

FITZURSE. From whom dost hold thy see ?

BECKET. My lord, from God  
In all things spiritual ; from the king  
Its temporal rights.

FITZURSE. Then wilt thou dare deny  
That all is from the king ?

BECKET. That is the king's,  
Unto the king give I: But that is God's,  
Unto God only.

DE MORVILLE. Curse this priestly prate!  
Are you, ye tonsured mob, bereft of reason,  
That so ye shame the honour of the king?

BECKET. The honour of the king is to do right:  
But I, since I have landed in this realm,  
Have suffered, though I bore the king's safe-conduct,  
Threats, losses, insults; let him succour me!

DE MORVILLE. If the king's men have injured you or yours,  
His is the hand to punish: Tell't to him;  
But dare not of thine own too great presumption,  
Loose the Church dogs on them!

BECKET. Thy head is high,  
Sir Hugh de Morville! and thy tongue is proud!  
Should any venture aught against the Church,  
Were he the noblest of you all, the Church  
Will at her time condemn him! I await  
No man's permission ere I mete out justice.

FITZURSE. By God! Thou threat'nest overmuch.

ALL. Threats! Threats!  
(*All rising and crowding round BECKET.*)

ROBERT. Priest! Wilt thou curse the kingdom?

LE BRETON. He shall not,  
And God so save me!

DE TRACY. Too many ere today  
Hath he undone by curses!

FITZURSE. Thomas Becket!  
We warn thee, at the peril of thy life  
Such words are spoken! In King Henry's name,  
Aye, in God's name—

BECKET. God is my shield, my lord.  
I know you come designing me to death,  
But I fear nothing: Threats and angry words  
Fall from the armour of my higher mind.

ROBERT. Shall swords be blunted so?

BECKET. If all the swords  
That England holds were hanging o'er my head,

And at a breath might fall, not all their terror  
Should aught avail to move me from my post.  
In life, till death, I bear the sword of God,  
Almighty justice.

ROBERT.                                Shall it guard thine head ?

BECKET.    That is as God shall will : But foot to foot  
I meet you in the battle of the Lord,  
And you shall find me faithful to the Cross,  
Living or dead.

1ST MONK.                            'Twere wiser to give ground  
And fly, my lord.

BECKET.                                Not I !—A timid priest  
I once have fled ;—I blush to tell my shame :  
Now am I here by order of the Pope,  
And here I stay : I turn my back no more.

FITZURSE.    Be warned ! A bloody deed is quickly done.

BECKET.    But, being bloody, stains the conscience ever.  
If I in peace may fill my priestly office  
'Tis well for me ; if not, God's will be done !

DE MORVILLE.    The mercy of the king is infinite,  
As are his orders just : Come thou with us  
And bow thy stubborn knees before his feet,  
And of his mercy he may spare thee yet.

BECKET.    Prate not to me of kings ! Am I a slave  
To kiss the crown because it is a crown ?  
The gold hath little honour, nor the steel,  
Save as the wearer be.

FITZURSE.                                Thou traitor priest !  
Wilt thou miscall the king ? By ev'ry hair  
Upon my head, I swear we part not so !

BECKET.    How dost thou dare to threaten me, who here,  
Here in my house, Archbishop, am thy lord ?  
Down on your knees, ye traitors ! Ye have sworn  
Between my hands all fealty and truth :  
Kneel, vassals ! Grovel in the dust for shame,  
And beg for pity !

DE MORVILLE.                        Pity ! Not from thee !  
Curst be the lips that vowed respect for thee,  
And blighted be the land is held of thee !

I am the king's!

ALL. We are the king's!

DE MORVILLE. 'Gainst all,

But most 'gainst thee, I take my stand by him.

FITZURSE. My lords, it is an easy thing to threaten;

We can do more: Come all with me!

(*To the Servants and Clerks.*) And you,  
Subjects and liegemen of the king, we charge  
To quit this man! (*No one moves.*)

And further do command,  
That ye do hold him in safe custody,  
And at the king's desire produce him straight.

BECKET. It needs no iron hand to keep me here;  
I shall not fly!—No! Not for any king,  
Or any living man. Go where you will,  
Come when you will, you find me here, my lords.  
Sir Hugh de Morville, yet one word with thee.

(*As the Knights go out, ROBERT seizes FITZNIGEL.*)

ROBERT. Come thou with us!

FITZNIGEL. My lord, they force me out!

BECKET. This is their might, is born of Satan's pow'r:

I pray you loose him!—Loose him, gentlemen!

He is no priest. (*Exeunt Knights.*)

1ST MONK. My lord, 'tis marvellous,  
Thou wilt not hear a word of any man:  
What need could be that thy great dignity  
Should yet more anger them?

BECKET. What should I do?

2ND MONK. 'Twere better to have chosen milder counsel  
And softer answer; at thy wrath they joy,  
Seeking to find occasion in thy speech,  
Or some direct excuse for that they will.

BECKET. Counsel I have: All that I ought to do  
I know full well.

1ST MONK. To Heav'n, my lord, I pray  
To make that counsel wise.

BECKET. If wise or not,  
I care but little. All in turn must die:  
Am I a dastard, that the fear of death



Should teach my later hours to fail in justice?  
 For God, and for the honour of His Church,  
 I go more readily to meet my death  
 Than those shall come to kill me.

2ND MONK.

Say you so?

We who are weaker dare not thus decide:  
 Sinners are we, not ready for the grave.  
 Of all are here not one, but thou alone,  
 Hath any haste for death.

BECKET.

God's will be done!

SERVANT (*rushing in.*) My lord! They arm! They arm!

BECKET.

What matter?—Arm?

E'en let them arm.

1ST MONK.

Fly to the Church, my lord!

BECKET. I will await them here.

ALL.

Fly! Fly, my lord!

BECKET. Ye timid coward monks! Are we not here  
 As surely shielded?

2ND MONK.

To the Church, my lord!

It is the hour of vespers.

BECKET.

Let us go!

(*They crowd round him, and are hurrying him off, when he stops.*)

Where is my cross. (*One bears it before him.*)

Do all things in due order!

(*Exeunt omnes.*)

END OF SCENE II.—ACT V.

## ACT V.

SCENE III.—*Canterbury Cathedral.*

(Vespers are being sung. Two boys rush in shouting "The swords! The swords!" Cries heard without "In the king's name!" The music ceases. The monks come down from the choir. Enter BECKET, half carried, half pushed.)

1ST MONK. Come in, my father! Here are wicked doings.

BECKET. Wicked they are; but fear not, I am here.

1ST MONK. Let us together suffer, and so pass

Together unto glory!—Leave us not!

Console us by thy presence!

(Shouts of "The King! The King's men!" with shrieking of women.)

BECKET. Fear ye not!

Have ye yet chanted vespers?

1ST MONK. Nay, my lord!

Ere yet we finished came these dreadful cries,

And stilled our singing.

BECKET. Go! Complete the office!

(They hesitate.)

Go to your places, or I enter not! (People rush in.)

What do these people fear?

1ST MAN. My lord, the cloister

Swarms with a crowd of angry armed men.

BECKET. I will go out to them.

1ST MONK. Nay! Nay, my lord!

Do not so rashly!—Rather come with us

Into the sanctuary: it may be,

That e'en these bloodstained soldiers may respect

It's sanctity.

BECKET. Our God is ev'rywhere!

Men bear within their hearts a sanctuary,

Or find no one place holy.

*(A knocking heard at the door. The monks try to bar it.)*

Off, ye cowards !

Let those blind wretches rage !

*(They still try to bar the door.)*

Desist, I say !

By virtue of obedience, I command

Ye do unbar the door !—The house of God

Is not kept fast with iron bolts and bars,

As is a castle :—He who owns can guard.

*(They draw him towards the choir. He breaks away from them, unbars the door, and opens it.)*

Come, let my people in !

Come in ! Come in !

*(The people rush in, the soldiers following, shouting and shrieking.)*

*(BECKET passes up the Church to the Choir with GRIMM and two others, who urge him on.)*

BECKET. Loose me and go ! Ye have no part in this ;

As God shall will let Him dispose of me.

FITZURSE *(rushes in)*. This way to me, king's men.

*(Two of those with BECKET fly, dropping the cross, which GRIMM takes up, and holds by BECKET. The other Knights rush in.)*

FITZURSE *(to the people)*.

Ye ! Stand ye fast !

LE BRETON. Where is the traitor Thomas ?

FITZURSE *(to a man)*.

Where is he ?

Where is my lord archbishop ?

BECKET *(coming down)*.

Here am I !

No traitor, but archbishop, priest of God.

ROBERT *(striking him with the flat of his sword)*.

Fly, or thou diest !

BECKET.

Never will I fly.

*(DE MORVILLE stands apart keeping back the people, the others press round BECKET.)*

LE BRETON. Wilt thou absolve the bishops ?

BECKET.

That I said

But now, I say again, and I will do

No more for any.—Reginald Fitzurse,

Much have I done for thee in many things ;

Art thou in arms against me?

FITZURSE.

As thou seest:

Thou traitor!

BECKET.

Do with me as ye shall please;

I am prepared to die: but as for these,

These my poor people, touch them not, I pray!

FITZURSE (*seizing him by his dress*).

Away with thee! I hold thee prisoner.

(BECKET *snatches away his dress*.)

BECKET. Do here whate'er ye will!

(*They try to drag him away. He flings FITZURSE to the ground. The people and monks are driven out by the soldiers.*)

Nay! Touch me not!

Fitzurse, you are my man, and owe to me

Homage and fealty.

FITZURSE.

I owe thee nothing

Against the king.

Strike! Strike!

(DE TRACY *makes a blow at BECKET, but strikes GRIMM, who falls.*)

BECKET.

God's will be done!

To Thee, O Lord, do I commend my spirit.

(FITZURSE *beats him to his knees.*)

I am ready to die.

(*Falls as FITZURSE strikes again.*)

LE BRETON.

Take that for love

Of my lord William.

(*Strikes and breaks his sword.*)

FITZURSE.

Now let us off, my lords!

The traitor's dead:—He'll rise no more again.

(*Exeunt Knights shouting "For the King! The King! The King's men!"*)

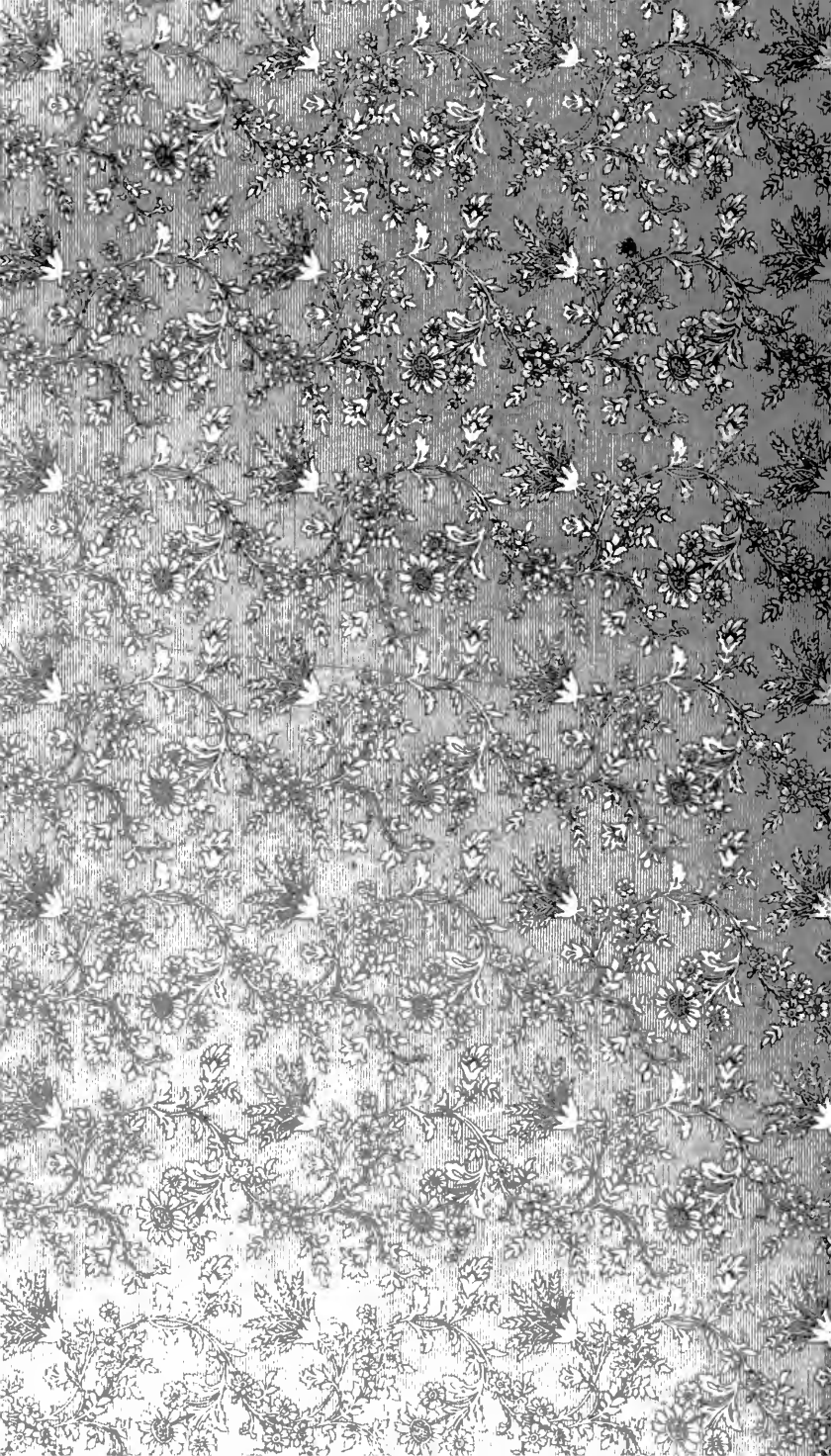
(*Silence, as their shouts die in the distance. The monks creep back one by one, and stand round the body. From a corner comes ROSAMOND, and kneels in prayer. As the curtain falls, all kneel in absolute silence.*)

END OF ACT V.

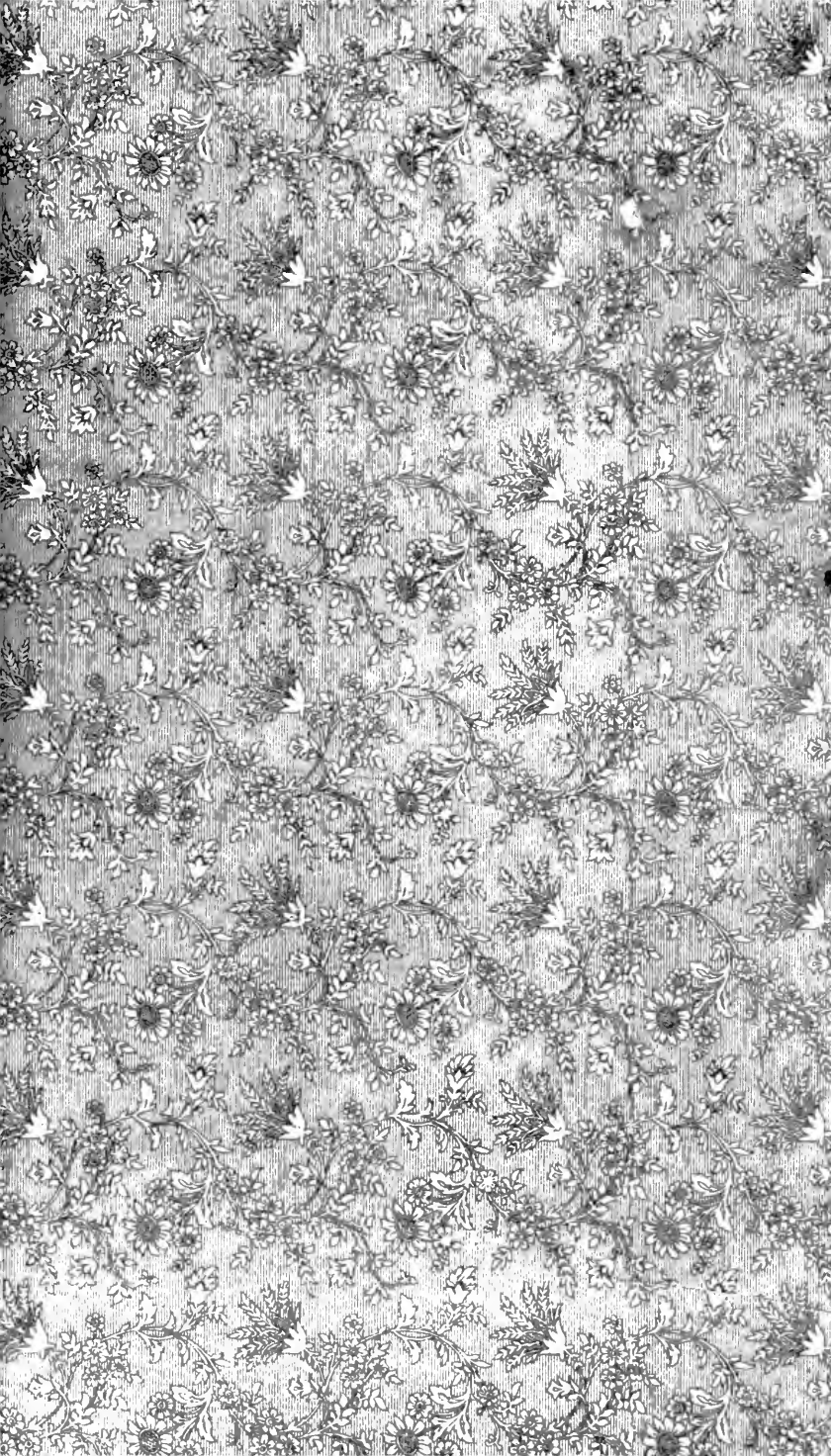












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